

Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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12 Best South America Walks

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- ◆ **Austria**
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- ◆ **Kenya**
- ◆ **Boston**
- ◆ **New Zealand**
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- ◆ **Travel Photo of the Year**





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**Better on foot**

This issue we celebrate the places best discovered by boot – from Austria's Tirol (pictured, p58) to South America's best (p28)

Welcome



One of the highlights of the *Wanderlust* year is always the Travel Photo of the Year Awards and this time round is no exception. Whether you saw the winning photos at the Destinations Travel Show or whether this is your first view, then I hope you agree they are a particularly fine crop (excuse the pun). And that it will inspire you to get snapping yourself this year to get some shots ready for the next competition.

This is the time of year too when you might feel inspired to up your exercise routine. We dusted off our walking boots for this issue, bringing you some of the best walks in South America (p28), walking hut to hut in Austria (p58) and strolling through Kenya's Rift Valley (p82). Mix in an exploration of Vietnam's extraordinary caves (p44), and some good Irish craic (p94), and you'll hopefully want to zip up your waterproof and get out there too.

And while on the theme of inspiration, if you travelled with a truly inspirational guide last year, the closing date for the Guide Awards is at the end of February so get nominating now (p90).

Happy travels,

Lyn Hughes
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

1 Some of the caves in Vietnam are so big they even have their own rainforests inside them, p44

2 Walkers and backpackers have a high risk of getting piles! Learn how to avoid them, p76

3 You will find salamanders high in the Tirolean Alps, p58

4 From March 27 you can fly to Boston from just £99, p141

5 When flying, a cheese grater can and will be confiscated for being a 'dangerous weapon', p134



THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?

**PHOEBE SMITH**

◆ EDITOR ◆

Sifting through backpacks, boots and luggage galore to find the best gear

SEE PAGE 79

**SARAH BAXTER**

◆ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ◆

Mapping the best ambles, strolls and treks that South America has to offer

SEE PAGE 28

**TOM HAWKER**

◆ PRODUCTION EDITOR ◆

Getting flamingo fever from Kenya's wildlife-rich Great Rift Valley

SEE PAGE 82

**ALEX GREGG**

◆ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ◆

Feeling inspired by your epic landscape, wildlife, people and icon photos

SEE PAGE 108

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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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Brought to you in part by our photo winners...



MADELEINE FITZSIMONS

Winner of the Icon category in Wanderlust's 2014 Photo of the Year competition (p108-126)

The judges loved Madeleine's unusual shot of St Paul's Cathedral, rising from the morning cloud and showcasing London's different architecture – old and new (p8)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Ocean – life is like a tidal wave of lows and highs.

First great travel experience?

Torremolinos. I was age 15, doing the disco scene every night.

Favourite journey?

I once got a free trip to Barbados, so my husband and I splashed out, going to the famous The Cliff restaurant.

Top five places worldwide?

London; New York; Barcelona; Sicily; Taiwan.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

East Europe. I InterRailed there before the fall of the Wall – it was like time travelling.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Japan.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Buying cheap sweets and biscuits in local supermarkets.



ALLAN DRANSFIELD

Winner of the People category in Wanderlust's 2014 Photo of the Year competition (p108-126)

Allan's image of the 'Karaoke King' is one of those pictures that's worth a thousand words – an entire story caught in the click of a camera button (p10)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

I am partial to the odd mountain.

First great travel experience?

Hitchhiking/camping my way around Sweden. It was my first solo trip.

Favourite journey?

The Trans-Siberian Express. Travelling from Europe to Asia, seeing this incredible nation, was pretty special.

Top five places worldwide?

Olkhon Island, Siberia; Chefchaouen, Morocco; Annapurna range, Nepal; Ladakh, India; Yorkshire.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

My DENIED stamp, trying to exit Hong Kong. It made me feel like a renegade!

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

What about a moon stamp? Or I suppose I'd love to live in Vanuatu.

Guilty travel pleasure?

I couldn't survive without my earplugs.



FRED BARRINGTON

Winner of the Landscape category in Wanderlust's 2014 Photo of the Year competition (p108-126)

Fred's penguin snap, taken in Antarctica, really has the wow factor. The judges were particularly impressed by how he'd conveyed a sense of scale (p6)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

All and none! Depends on what there is.

First great travel experience?

My first trip to California in 1978.

Favourite journey?

It's better to arrive than to travel! But I would have to say a cruise around the Galápagos Islands.

Top five places worldwide?

Of those I have been to, other than Britain, in no particular order: India; Antarctica; Galápagos; Italy; South Africa (not a single place there, but the country as a whole).

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Port Lockroy, Antarctica.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

The Arctic.

Guilty travel pleasure?

All travel is pleasurable and I feel no guilt about it!



JOHN WEBSTER

Winner of the Wildlife category in Wanderlust's 2014 Photo of the Year competition (p108-126)

John's image of a red-footed falcon – with its intense gaze, ruffled feathers and water droplets flying in the air – came out on top in the Wildlife category (p12)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Desert: I have enjoyed the Sahara, Kalahari, Mojave and Namib on my travels.

First great travel experience?

A trip to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming with a fellow photographer.

Favourite journey?

Travelling from Calgary to Jasper National Park via Banff, Lake Louise and the Icefields Parkway.

Top five places worldwide?

Iceland's South Coast; Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania; Val d'Orcia, Tuscany; Yellowstone and Grand Teton NPs, USA; Venice (the most beautiful city).

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Namibia.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

New Zealand.

Guilty travel pleasure?

My iPod on long flights.



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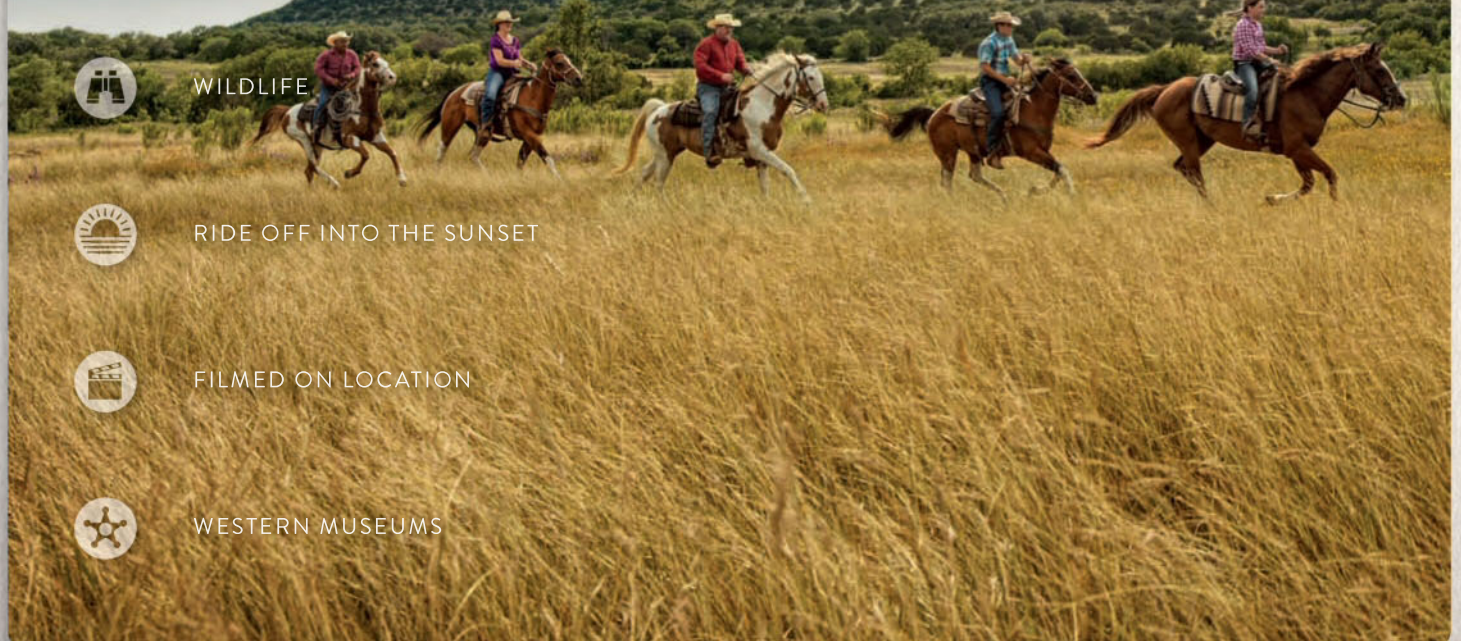
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March 2015



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▲ Cover story

108 Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year 2014

It's that time again! We've sifted through a colossal number of entries this year – over 7,000 – and our judges have made that difficult final selection. Turn to p108 to reveal this year's incredible finalists and winners

■ Special feature

28 12 Best South America Walks

You've done the Inca Trail – what's next? We've selected 12 top South American treks that will race your pulse and lace your boots – for all abilities from day walks to multi-day treks

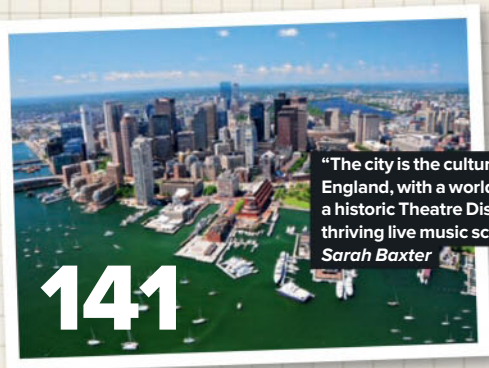
WIN!

A 4-night rail adventure across Austria p68

A choice of two incredible British walking trips p103



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Boston, p141



South America Walks, p28

LEAD WALKING GROUPS... ...with John Cousins, p73



FEATURES

44 Vietnam Head into the darkness with snakes and huntsman spiders for company... and explore the enigmatic caves of Vietnam's Quang Binh province

58 Austria Come with us on a hut-to-hut adventure in Austrian Tirol, discovering epic scenery, great company, high peaks and crazy summer weather

82 Kenya Taking on a new trail in the timeworn Great Rift Valley – a confection of African heritage and freshwater-fond wildlife

94 Connemara, Ireland Spotting ponies and getting caught up in the magic of Ireland's storm-battered west coast

FROM THE ROAD

104 Your Story How do you survive Kyoto's worst snowstorm in six decades? Our brave reader Rachelle Meilleur tells us how she made it through

106 Letters In our mailbox: holidaymakers and their demanding photo standards; self-publishing praise; remembering Nyiragongo; more trailblazers

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POCKET GUIDES

137 First 24 Hours: Skopje Far and away from the concrete Communist buildings of the sixties, Skopje has been getting a much-needed facelift – and we've been exploring

139 Travel Icon: Westland National Park, NZ Verdant rainforest, icy lagoons and colossal lakes – this park is a glacier-sculpted paradise for walkers and adrenaline junkies alike

141 Short Break: Boston A history hub and home to more Ivy League institutions than you can shake a gavel at, Boston's also great for a bit of Irish craic this St Patrick's Day

Discovery Channel

"My plan had been to explore this winter wonderland snow-free, bathed in summer sunshine, spending my days strolling from hut to hut. But St Anton had other ideas." *Phoebe Smith*

Connemara, p94

Austria, p58

Skopje, p137

Kenya, p82

Vietnam, p44

"Hot springs and geysers frothed and bubbled along the waterside. Pelicans looked on from high branches. The whole scene had a grand, cinematic quality; I was left marvelling...." *Ben Lerwill*

"The slate-grey of the cave wall was punctuated with bright dots, shining like diamonds; closer inspection revealed them to be the reflective eyes of huntsman spiders, each with leg spans as large as my outstretched hand." *David Lloyd*

New Zealand, p139

TALKING HEADS Monty Halls, p22

"The big question for me was 'Can you still genuinely get off the beaten track?' We had limited time and money, so a lot of the things that we did, anyone with a backpack and a sense of adventure can do."



LANDSCAPE
WINNER



PENGUIN PLETHORA

South Shetlands, Antarctica

Photographer: **Fred Barrington**

Size matters. And that's just as true where travel photography is concerned. Fortunately, Fred Barrington, winner of the *Wanderlust* Photo of the Year Landscape category, knows all about scale: he wowed the judges with this incredible shot. "When you are in Antarctica you see a lot of penguins, so taking a picture of individual penguins is therefore very easy," explains Fred. "Another viewpoint is required. I took this because it shows a sense of scale, with the penguins dwarfed by the cliffs, and the snow hanging over them like a Sword of Damocles. The two people are important: they are so outnumbered by the penguins, illustrating that it is the birds' terrain not ours!"

Turn to p108 to see all the other winners and shortlisted entries

360



V i e w f i n d e r





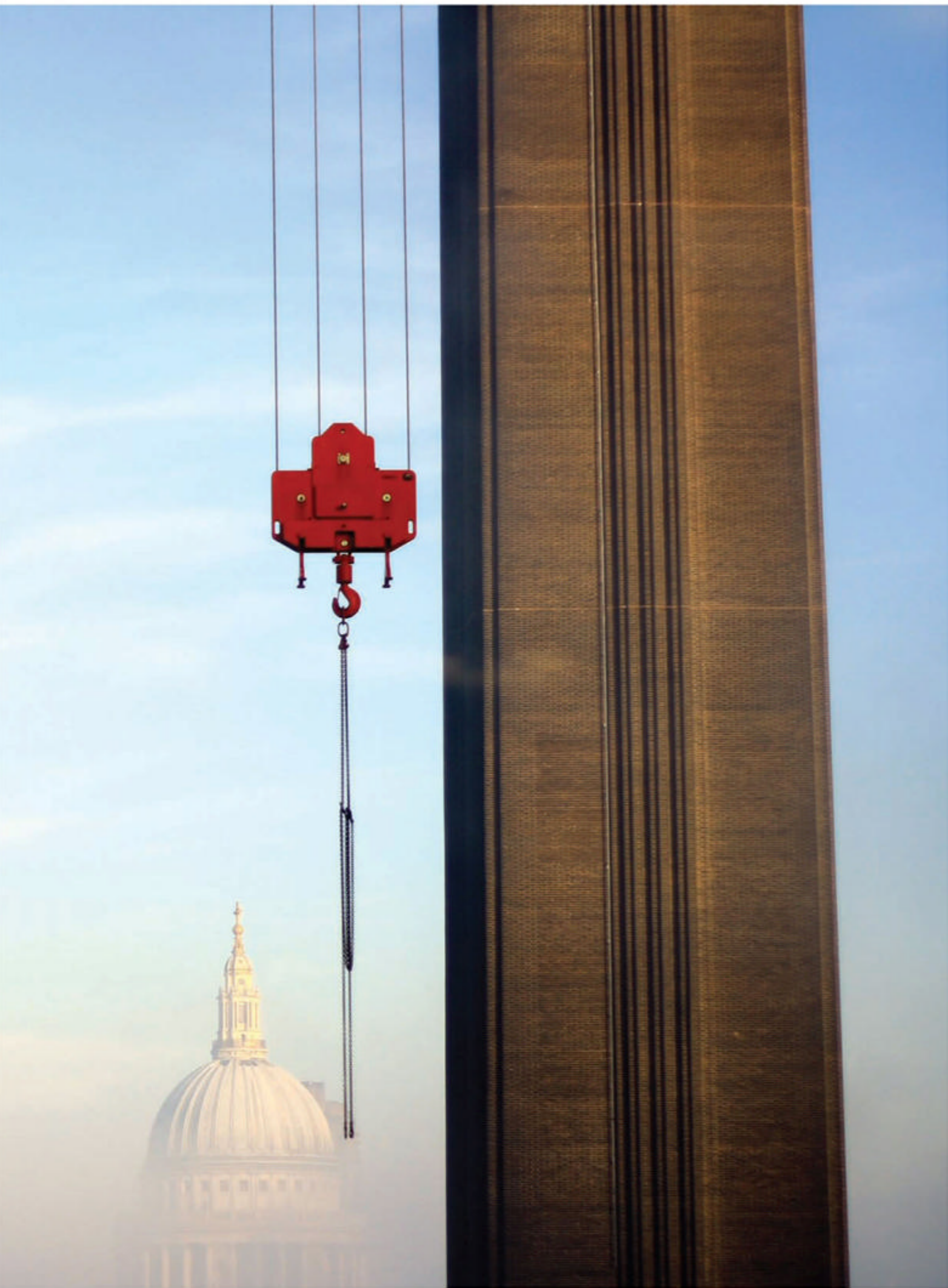
RIISING TO THE TOP

London, UK

Photographer: **Madeleine Fitzsimons**

London's South Bank is a hub for travellers seeking lively culture, bustling cafés and diverse street entertainment – a great place to experience the atmosphere of the UK's capital. But Madeleine Fitzsimons' striking image – winner of the *Wanderlust* Photo of the Year's Icon category – has captured a whole different side to the area, with the famous dome of St Paul's Cathedral rising serenely out of the morning mist.

Turn to p108 to see all the other winners and shortlisted entries





PEOPLE
WINNER



SINGSTAR

Hpa-An, Burma (Myanmar)

Photographer: **Allan Dransfield**

Burma is a high on many a traveller's tick lists. Most head there for the temples, landscapes and interesting architecture. But Allan Dransfield – winner of the *Wanderlust* Photo of the Year People category – found something entirely different on his visit: “After a morning up at the pagoda I was returning to the taxi-port on the Thanlyin River when I heard some enchanting beats coming from a nearby shed,” he explains. “I went to investigate and inside I found two local chicks, clucking around to the lustful sounds of the Karaoke King.”

Turn to p108 to see all the other winners and shortlisted entries



WILDLIFE
WINNER



RED-FOOTED FALCON

Hungary

Photographer: John Webster

From whale-watching experiences to game safaris spotting the 'Big Five', getting up close to wildlife is one of globetrotting's greatest appeals. It's hard to get quite *this* close though. Retired structural engineer John Webster withstood the pouring rain to stand next to this female falcon as she got drenched by the torrential downpour – which lasted over an hour. When the rain subsided and she decided it was time to dry off, John seized his moment...

A worthy Wildlife winner in our book.

Turn to p108 to see all the other winners and shortlisted entries



■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!



"Volunteering with pandas in **Chengdu, China**. I couldn't resist a snap of this bamboo-munching panda."

Jonathan Heathcote-Curtis



"At the top of **Toubkal, Morocco** – at 4,167m, North Africa's highest peak. Needless to say, the mountains are majestic."

Lelde Leoke

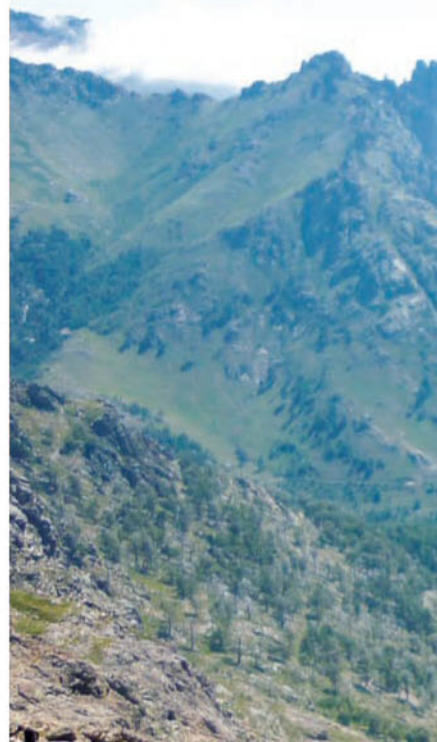


"Enjoying lunch with our guide and driver in the **Atacama Desert, Chile**. Thanks for all the inspiration!"

Enid & (behind the lens) Graham Maguire

"On **Bocca di Fogghiale, Corsica**, on day five of the GR20 trail, completed in 13 hard but stunning days."

Nick & Jane Moore





"For many years I've wanted to send in a photo of me and my *Wanderlust*, and this year I remembered to take a copy away with me! I'm in one of the most amazing places I've ever been: **Dead Vlei, Namibia.**" Julie Gardiner



Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including an adaptable **Wool Buff®** – a Merino wool travel accessory to keep you warm throughout the winter (RRP £25). But can you do better than Julie (above)? We want to see where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

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"Being the highest person in **Ethiopia** at this moment, 4,550m up **Ras Dashen** – plus an extra metre! Tough but worth it – a brilliant feeling." Hazel Strudwick



"Watching my husband photograph a herd of wildebeest in **Northern Kenya**. A lone waterbuck got caught up and decided to head off in a different direction... straight at him. Fortunately it turned at the last minute." Jean de Roock

12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your March essentials: Oz's newest underwater hot spot; Monty Halls climbs new highs; trekking Tenerife and deep-south dining in the USA

1 Travel issues Change is on the cards for Cuba

In light of Obama's landmark plans to re-build relations between the USA and Cuba, we ask: should we go now before it changes forever?

December was a landmark month. Barack Obama finally released details about the relaxation of US travel restrictions to Cuba, meaning that soon Americans will discover the delights of this communist Caribbean nation for themselves. While it's great news for North American travellers, many tour operators are now reporting a sudden increase in bookings from others who are worried that its time-warp charm – a confection of vintage muscle cars, colourful squares and vibrant culture – will make way to chain hotels, shops and cafes.

"The demand is already starting to outstrip availability," confirms Stuart Whittington, head of product at Journey Latin America. His advice is to book early with a bonded tour operator and to go soon – before it changes: "Cuba has a real buzz about it, experience it while it's intact and share this moment of history with the people," he adds.

But not everyone thinks the rush is necessary. Sarah Cameron, author of the *Footprint Cuba Handbook*, believes any changes will be slow: "The socio-political

structure is unlikely to change anytime soon," she says. "There may be fewer old American gas guzzlers on the streets and more modern SUVs, there may be a McDonald's, there may be advertising billboards, but that hardly constitutes a loss of cultural identity."

So will new flights – like Air China's Beijing to Havana route, rumoured to be launching in September – mean more touristy, Disneyland-like attractions?

Of course not, reckons Cuba aficionado and

The Independent's senior travel editor Simon Calder. "In 2015 it is a country resurrected," he says. "It is confident,

energetic and proud of a rich and multifaceted culture that has

withstood austerity and will be strong enough to resist easy Americanisation.

"With the US as a friend, not foe, Cuba can begin a new chapter as a regional power. The other Caribbean islands are probably trembling in their flip-flops, but competition is good and should sharpen them up," he adds.

Whether it's going to transform slowly or rapidly, a little or a lot, the advice is still abundantly clear: 2015 is a great time to experience Cuba in all its glory.

'Other Caribbean islands are probably trembling in their flip-flops'

Drive into the future
Does Cuba stand on the cusp of becoming more progressive... and also losing its charm?

Dreamstime



■ The Nitty Gritty

5 must-see places

Visit these Cuban gems before they change or – worse – get overrun with tourists...

1 Havana The county's capital is a mishmash of faded glamour, colonial architecture and, in recent years, bright city lights. There's charming hotels and B&Bs to suit most budgets, not to mention the vintage cars and classic cocktails.

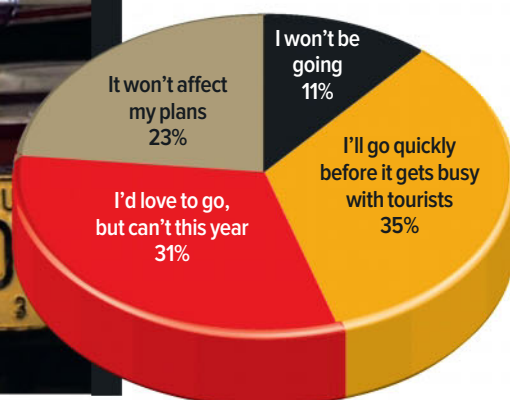
2 Finca Vigía The former home of Ernest Hemingway, this modest plot in San Francisco de Paula is where the writer penned some of his most famous works, such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.

3 Zapata Peninsula and Bay of Pigs There's more to this famous region than Cold War history: the peninsula is also an area of swamps, mangroves, and beaches – home to abundant wildlife. Mostly a national park, it is the largest ecosystem on the island and is an important winter home for migrating birds.

4 Santiago de Cuba Culture and soul reverberate here. It's got colonial casas, Caribbean rhythms and the *Basílica de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre* – an important Cuban pilgrimage site.

5 Trinidad A colonial Spanish settlement, this 16th-century, UNESCO-listed town is so flawlessly preserved, it could be an outdoor museum.

■ Online reader poll
Will the changing relations between the US and Cuba affect your plans to visit Cuba?



New Routes

GO NOW...

Island ambling
Trek to Teide at
Tenerife's first
walking festival



2 Tackle trails in Tenerife

Why go?

Five days, 700 ramblers and a 1,500km network of paths... The inaugural Tenerife Walking Festival (10-14 March 2015) is going to be *big*, so there's a ramble to suit all abilities and tastes, no matter whether you want to explore coastal scenery, green spaces or volcanic lands, or if you fancy stopping at a museum or winery en route.

The nautical northern hub of Puerto de la Cruz is the starting point for 15 varied trails, all

taking up to five hours to complete. You'll get the chance to visit the UNESCO-listed Teide National Park, home to a stratovolcano that soars 3,718m skyward. Nature lovers will adore the Anaga and Teno Rural Parks, both brimming with biological and zoological treasures, from ancient laurel forests to Barbary falcon.

For a dose of history, navigate steep ridges and winding roads to reach the pretty seaside town of Taganana – one of the oldest

settlements on the island. Finally, head out after dark to search the cosmos for stars and space dust from the Teide Observatory.

Grab your boots and sign up at tenerifewalkingfestival.com to get started.



Where to stay?

Try Los Geranios, a family-run guesthouse in Puerto de la Cruz's old town. Doubles from €27pn (pensionlosgeranios.com).



Get there now!

Fly London Gatwick-Tenerife North, via Madrid, from £159rtn with Air Europa (aireuropa.com; for the festival flights go 9-15 March).



Or how about these...

From February 2015, Icelandair will launch new twice-weekly flights from Birmingham to Reykjavik, providing a new gateway to its 14 destinations in North America. See icelandair.co.uk.

Gear

3 BUY THIS... Aclima DesignWool £115, nordicoutdoor.co.uk



Merino baselayers are great: they keep you warm when it's cold, move sweat away when it's hot, and – due to naturally occurring properties in the wool

– don't smell even after multiple days' use. They can often look a bit too sporty – but not so with this ingenious Scandi design. Now you can go from peak to pub seamlessly – ideal for travelling.

Film

4 WATCH THIS... The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel Out in cinemas from 26 Feb



The number of crumbly hotels and, er, crumbly residents start increasing in this sequel to the 2012 offering, with Richard Gere joining the cast in Jaipur. This time, the gang – adjusting to their new lives in India – are caught up in Sonny's plans to expand his hotel empire and give his fiancée the wedding of their dreams.

TV

5 RECORD THIS... Lost Worlds Discovery Channel, from 13 Feb, 9pm



Confronting fears, tackling prehistoric predators and treading where few humans have gone before, adventurers Leo Houlding and Monty Halls have their work cut out in this four-part series. Venturing past the tourism hotspots of Guyana and Borneo, they discover mystical waterfalls, confounding caves and vast wildernesses, ripe for exploring.

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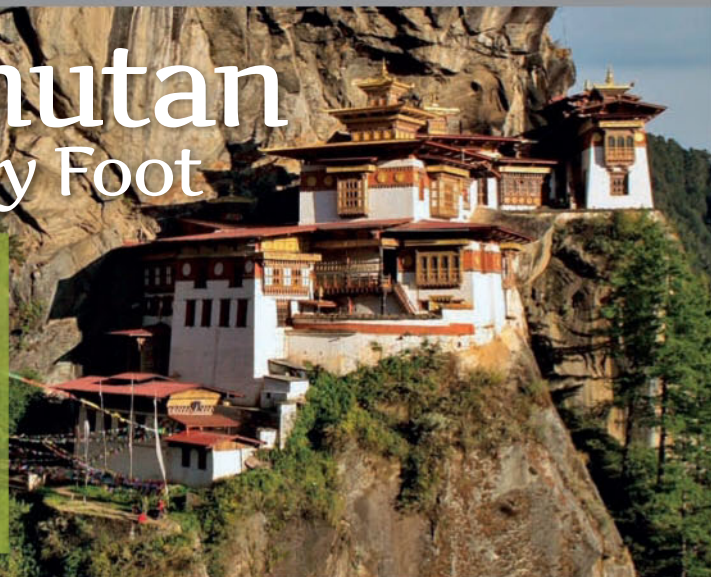
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World Food

EAT THIS...



TOP TIP

Extra-virgin olive oil is one of the healthiest fats. It's loaded with antioxidants, is naturally free of cholesterol, trans fat, salt, sugar and gluten, and is about 75% monounsaturated fat (that's the good kind!).

6

Deep South food doesn't just mean deep-fried chicken

To most cooks, the Deep South equals deep-fried. But not all of the USA's southern states serve it up like Colonel Sanders – as Virginia-born chef Sean Brock proves in his diverse, inventive yet quintessentially southern recipe book: *Heritage*. The co-host of Emmy-winning culinary show *The Mind of a Chef*, Sean uses *Heritage* to introduce his favourite ingredients and dishes. An emissary of southern food and culture, he's hoping to elevate the cuisine's status in the eyes of the world.

One whole section of the book is dedicated to earthy dishes sourced from 'the garden'; within this is a range of tasty salad recipes, all made with local ingredients. And there is one common element slathered over all these leaves: a healthy dose of flavour-rich – yet

vastly under-appreciated – Texan olive oil. Sean sources a lot of his olive oil from southern Texas. "You can taste the difference."

Olive oil from the Lone Star State isn't as surprising as you might think: parts of Texas have a climate similar to central Italy, and the locals are just as attached to what grows in it. This climate – and fondness for kicking back in it, enjoying its produce – is why the oft-ignored South is ideal for long, languid road trips in an open-top motor trying as much southern hospitality as your stomach can handle, between stops at heavily forested national parks and Civil War-era historical sites.

Healthy deep-south salads, heavy on Texan oil (of a different kind)? Well, if it's good enough for Sean's back garden barbecues then it should be well worth a try.



WATERMELON & RED ONION SALAD

Serves 6

For the shrimp:

580ml white vinegar
240ml fresh lemon juice
120ml fresh lime juice
60ml fresh orange juice
120ml extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
1 tbsp each of kosher salt, coriander seeds and yellow mustard seeds (crushed)
1 tsp celery seeds
1 tsp fennel pollen
½ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
½ tsp turmeric
1½lbs large shrimp, peeled and deveined

For jalapeno vinaigrette:

3 jalapeno peppers, seeded/diced
Grated zest of 1 lime
120ml fresh lime juice
1½ tsp sugar
1½ tsp kosher salt
180ml canola oil
120ml extra-virgin olive oil

Other:

1 head bibb lettuce, separated into leaves, washed and dried
1 small, ripe watermelon, peeled, seeded and cut into 1-inch cubes
1 small red onion, shaved thin

Method

1. Put all shrimp ingredients – except the shrimp – in a stainless-steel pot; simmer, cook for 10 mins. Remove from heat, add shrimp.
2. Allow shrimp to poach until they turn pink and curl (15 mins).
3. Remove shrimp, refrigerate; pour pickling liquid into a new container and cool.
4. Return shrimp to liquid. Cover and refrigerate for two days.
5. Vinaigrette: blend the peppers, lime zest, lime juice, sugar and salt till smooth. With the blender running, slowly add the oils.
6. Lightly coat lettuce leaves with vinaigrette. Divide the lettuce, shrimp and watermelon among six bowls and garnish with the onion.

Recipe from Sean Brock's *Heritage* (Artisan, 2014) is out now, priced £28

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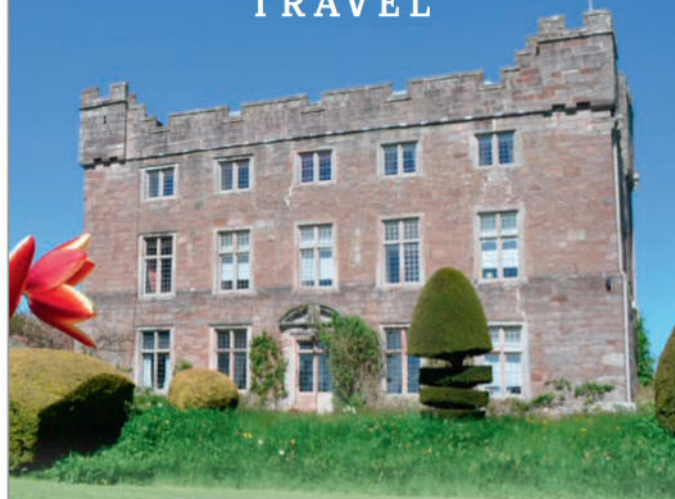


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MasterChef
TRAVEL



A taste of gourmet Cumbria

3 days from £395 | Departs 2 June 2015



Sampling local dishes is one of the greatest pleasures of travel, as it is in a country's food that its culture and character is often revealed. On a MasterChef Travel holiday you'll not only discover the area's sights and flavours but also learn the culinary secrets of local experts, seek out regional ingredients and have a go at creating dishes for yourself.

Our **A taste of gourmet Cumbria** small-group tour includes these highlights:

- Feast on menus bursting with fresh Cumbrian produce
- 2 nights at luxurious Askham Hall with breakfast
- Three-course dinner by head chef Richard Swale
- Wine tasting & tour of the kitchen garden
- Cookery demo by executive chef Steven Doherty

020 7873 5005

mastercheftravel.com

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7 **MONTY HALLS FINDS LOST WORLDS**

■ Five minutes with...

The marine biologist teams up with climber Leo Houlding to explore **Lost Worlds** for his new TV show. It's just a shame he's afraid of heights...

What's the idea behind **Lost Worlds**?

The big question for me was: can you still genuinely get off the beaten track? Does it still exist? The interesting thing for us was that we had limited time and money, so a lot of the things that we did, anyone with a backpack and a sense of adventure, can do.

How did you select the places to visit?

We had to go to places that we could get to quickly but were unexplored. You'd think if you could get to it quickly, obviously it's going to be explored. But we realised there were a number of places where ecotourism had pushed quite far in but, if you literally pushed in two or three days from there, you were suddenly hitting environments that ecotourism hadn't penetrated.

There were other places that we threw a little bit of money at. We were like, 'Right, we need a helicopter to get in there' – in particular were Kamarang and Oshi Falls [both in Guyana]. No-one's really been there and done the work we're doing. Local Amerindians have hunting trails around but they tend to avoid it; they think it's a bit of a mystical place.

What was your best discovery?

I'm not a climber, unlike Leo, so for me this was a very personal challenge, because I don't like heights. Standing 1,000ft up a rockface in the Melinau Gorge [in Borneo] was hell! I'm a diver! So it was a very personal moment, and I'd rate it. I think Kamarang Falls was spectacular and special and extraordinary – really sort of mystical, Conan Doyle *Lost World* stuff.

Leo's a famed climber, you're a former marine – was there a little bit of testosterone flying between you?

There was definitely a bit of 'old bull, young bull' going on. Often the two of us would push ahead of the rest of the group and sort of test each other out. Leo is used to leading



'I don't like heights. Standing 1,000ft up a rockface in the Melinau Gorge was hell!'

his own expeditions and so am I, and there can be a danger that sparks fly. I think the way that was resolved was that we both had our areas of expertise: when we were climbing I completely handed over all authority and leadership to him; when we were doing the biology stuff, he totally handed it all over to me.

Did you have any close shaves?

Ironically the climbing was probably the safest thing I did. The guys were keenly aware that I had very little climbing experience, so they double-roped me all the time. Leo had a couple of falls and one of them was a humdinger. He was 700ft-or-so up the Melinau Gorge; he peeled off and a little bit of protection came out as well. I think he fell about 30 or 40ft – and we caught that on camera! That was quite a moment.

When you go away on an expedition, what's the first thing in your travel bag?

My camera. I'm an amateur, but a very enthusiastic amateur. I firmly believe you either have the talent for it or you don't... and I plainly don't!

Lost Worlds starts on 13 February, 9pm (Discovery Channel). For the full interview with Monty, go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/154

■ The Big Debate

8 **Would you travel Economy Minus?**

A major airline is reportedly considering an Economy Minus class: a range of seats with less leg-room, sold at a cheaper price. The pitch would be less than 30" – compared with standard economy at 30-31" and higher-end seats at 35-38". So, we took to our forum on www.wanderlust.co.uk and asked you, our intrepid readers, would you buy a ticket?



YES

Keith Ruffles, budget-conscious Wanderluster

Absolutely – not only because higher fares are out of my price range but also because I take pleasure in paying as little as possible to fly – one time I emptied my carry-on bag of all clothing and put everything on (five T-shirts, two pairs of jeans, two fleeces and a jacket) so they wouldn't charge me £30 to put it in the hold! It could be a godsend for backpackers and gap year travellers.

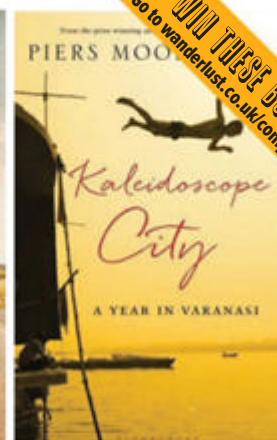
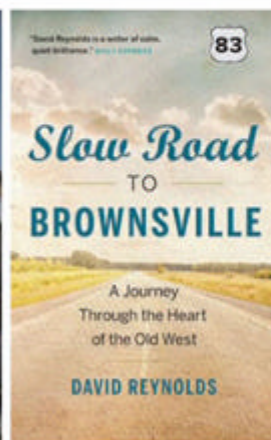
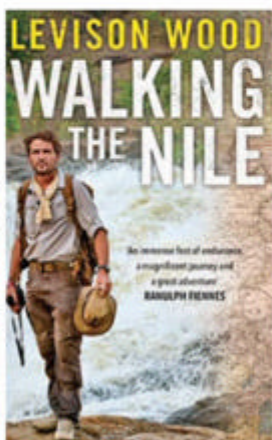
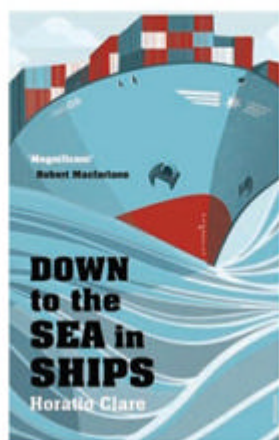


NO

Mikaela Harriss, space-loving Wanderlust reader

I definitely would not be interested! I have long legs, which make any economy seat quite uncomfortable – made even worse if the person reclines. I love the fact that easyJet and Ryanair have stopped reclining seats!

Join the debate at www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust



WIN THESE BOOKS!
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9 Read this...

Go by boat, boot or bullet

Many journeys, many modes, much adventure: this month's top picks

People make journeys for many reasons, but trade sits at the root of the original travel industry. The modern steel-hearts of the goods movement are the super container ships, which Horatio Clare hops aboard in his readable *Down to the Sea in Ships* (Vintage, £9), now out in paperback. His voyages take him to the extremes of long-distance seafaring, with the hardy crews who do it every day.

The hunt for adventure is another reliable travel motivator, and Levison Wood gets a lot more than he bargained for in his drama-filled TV-tie in *Walking the Nile* (Simon &

Schuster, £19). The book is actually better than the show, giving Wood space to explore the locals' lives and the dangerous politics of the countries he's tramping through.

The unrecognised state of Transnistria – the breakaway land north of Moldova that refused to leave the USSR – provides intrigue for Rory MacLean and Nick Danziger in *Back in the USSR* (Unbound, £20). The pair bring out the deep irony in the gaps between the real people and the often-outrageous world – of wealth, poverty and politics – they live in.

David Reynolds also has an adventure on his road trip through America, travelling

along Highway 83, which connects Canada to the Mexico border. The people that he meets in his *Slow Road to Brownsville* (Greystone Books, £11) successfully flesh out the dusty badlands, away from the hick stereotypes.

Many journeys end in Varanasi, usually in a pile of ashes by the Ganges. Piers Moore Ede spends a fascinating year here in his clear-eyed *Kaleidoscope City* (Bloomsbury, £17), taking in the corruption as well as the spiritualism.

For an artier look at the subcontinent, try Granta's new issue of *India* (£13), a suitably chaotic cross-section of writings around one of the planet's unwieldiest countries.

10 What's On UK EVENTS

BANFF MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL

Various UK venues, now to Jun

www.banff-uk.com

Tickets from £13.50.

From Edinburgh to Truro and over the sea to Dublin, the 2015 Banff Mountain Film Festival will traverse the UK and Ireland, hitting 55 towns to showcase a handful of the best new adrenalin-fuelled movies. For instance, watch climber Jeremy Collins journey through the Amazon, across the China-Mongolia border and into the northern outposts of Canada, via California's Yosemite Valley, in *Drawn*. Or catch *Sufferfest 2: Desert Alpine*, in which thrillseekers Alex Honnold and Cedar Wright attempt to climb 45 of the American Southwest's most iconic desert towers, cycling between Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona. Inspiring stuff!

BRISTOL WILDERNESS LECTURES

Bristol, 4 & 18 Mar

www.wildernesslectures.com

Chemistry Theatre, Clifton, BS8 1TS.

Advance tickets £8, on the door £8.50.

This lecture season draws to a close with two fantastic speakers. On 4 March, caver Martyn Farr will talk *Into The Pupu*, chatting about his underground discoveries beneath New Zealand's Takaka Valley. On 18 March, pro triathlete Michelle Blaydon talks *Steep Skiing in Baffin's Remote Arctic Fjords*.

AQUILEIA: THE GREAT LOST CITY

London, 6 Mar-31 May

www.rgs.org

Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, SW7 2AR. Open Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm; Sat, 10am-4pm; closed Sun.

UNESCO-listed Aquileia was one of the

wealthiest cities of the early Roman Empire, a vital port that was crucial to the realm's survival. Until it was conquered by Attila, that is. It remains intact and unexcavated, making it the most complete example of a Roman metropolis in the Mediterranean. Stroll round the RGS to discover remarkable mosaics and glassware salvaged from the site.

GLOBETROTTERS CLUB

Chester, 21 Mar

www.chesterglobetrotters.co.uk

25-27 Grosvenor St, Chester, CH1 2DD.

£3 (including refreshments); from 1pm.

Contact Hanna (01244 383392), Angela

(01244 629930) or chesterbranch@globetrotters.co.uk.

Pamela Scott-Austin talks traversing New

Zealand solo by bus, and Don and Eve

relay the wonders of South America.

NIGHT OF ADVENTURE

London, 24 Mar

www.hopeandhomes.org

Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way,

WC1H 0AL. £20; from 6.30pm.

'Celebrating the spirit of adventure in all its guises' – that's the ethos of Night of Adventure, says co-founder and trailblazer Alastair Humphreys. Each speaker (all explorers and daredevils) has just 20 slides to tell their story; each slide rolls on after 20 seconds, so you get swept up in the excitement and urgency of their tale. See the website for the full line-up.

CORAL REEFS: SECRET CITIES OF THE SEA

London, 27 Mar-13 Sept

www.nhm.ac.uk

Natural History Museum, Cromwell Rd,

SW7 5BD. £10; exhibition open

10am-5.50pm daily (last entry 5.15pm).

Coral reefs are home to a quarter of all living species in the sea. They're vital for us too: more than 500 million people depend on them for their livelihood. Their benefits – from fishing and tourism to storm protection – are worth more than £200bn each year. NHM's new exhibition will dive into this bustling marine habitat, with more than 200 coral, fish and fossil specimens on display.

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... BREMER CANYON

Killer elite
Among its riches, Bremer Canyon is home to around 100 killer whales



11

Squid, sharks and the southern hemisphere's biggest group of killer whales... Bremer Canyon is a newly-minted marine-life magnet

Australia is renowned for its biodiversity-rich seas and oceans, an underwater world of skyscraper coral reefs, submerged rock walls and profuse wildlife. But while most travellers' first mental image of underwater Oz will – understandably – be the Great Barrier Reef, this vast country has a treasure trove of coastline gems to explore: Bremer Bay – 515km southeast of Perth – being a case in point.

Head out to sea from this coastal town and 70km later you'll find Bremer Canyon and, with that, a deepwater ecosystem that's home to some of the sea's biggest players...

So what can I see?

Whale sharks, giant squid, humpback whales, sperm whales and more than 100 orcas, to name a fraction... The Canyon is also part of the Bremer Commonwealth Marine Reserve, home to the vulnerable great white shark and endangered Australian sea lion, as

well as Indian yellow-nosed albatross, soft-plumaged petrel and flesh-footed shearwater too.

Why is it there?

The most likely explanation is down to a fossil fuel deposit that's buried deep beneath the seabed. This hydrocarbon pocket has been leaking and fusing with the surrounding water to create an ice-like reef known as methane hydrate. This appears to be the green light for crustaceans to release billions of nutrient-packed eggs into the ocean, the beginning of a food chain which is lorded over by some of most revered predators on our blue planet.

How was it discovered?

By accident. A pair of marine researchers and documentary filmmakers (Dave and Jennene Riggs) were actually doing a blue fin tuna survey off the south coast of Western

Australia and instead spotted aggregations of orcas and great whites in and around the Canyon.

How can I see this?

The Canyon becomes the epicentre for an unbelievable intensity of life just once a year. The Bremer Canyon Killer Whale research project (www.bremercanyon.com) reckons orcas are present 99% of the time, but are more prevalent in the summer. For 2015 it has teamed up with Naturaliste Charters (www.whales-australia.com.au) to run small-group trips throughout February and March; tours run from 7.30am-4.30pm and cost AU\$350pp (£193).

Aboard the *Cetacean Explorer* you'll not only be on the lookout for this marine habitat and its populace, but also helping to identify the marine wildlife, contributing to the eco-project's preservation efforts. For more info on the region, visit westernaustralia.com.

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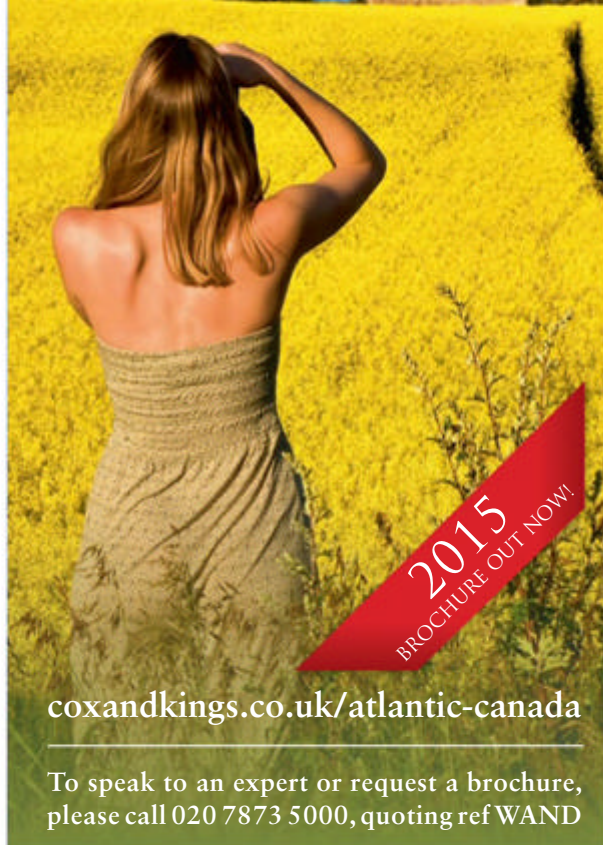
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FACE TO FACE WITH ATLANTIC CANADA

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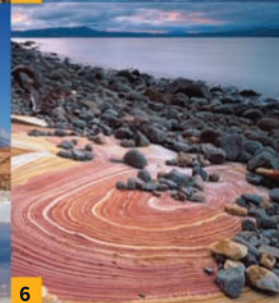
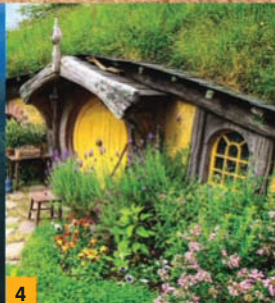
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12 GET BEHIND THE WHEEL

Be Inspired



Hitting the open road, stopping when you feel like it, cruising where the wind takes you... Ah, the joys of a road-trip! However, while a sense of freedom is key to enjoying a self-drive, booking a tailor-made road trip is perfect for ensuring that you don't miss any of the best sights, that you secure the most characterful accommodation and that you maximise your time – as well as providing a safety net should anything go awry. So here are nine trips to get you all revved up.

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. Namibia

4WD across the African wilds

Want to pitch a tent, cook your own supper and sleep under a million stars? Then Rainbow Tours' new *Self-Drive Roof-Top Camping* trip is the perfect adventure. Get behind the wheel of a 4WD – complete with easy-to-assemble roof-top tent – and discover the giant sand dunes of Sossusvlei, wildlife-rich Etosha, the desert elephants of Damaraland and the seal colonies and shipwrecks of the Atlantic coast.

Who: Rainbow Tours (020 7666 1250, rainbowtours.co.uk)

When: Year-round

How long: 14 days

How much: £2,195 (incl flights)

2. Chile

Travel from coast to crater

Pura Aventura's *Vineyards & Volcanoes* tour will introduce you to the wonders of central Chile, especially its great outdoors. Visit the vivid stilt houses of Chiloé island, Colchagua's fine wine estates, smoking Villarrica volcano, the monkey-puzzle forests of Huerquehue NP and the hot springs of Huife, staying in local hotels and inns en route. And no problem if you want to stretch your legs: you'll get maps and walking notes too.

Who: Pura Aventura (01273 676712, pura-aventura.com)

When: Year-round

How long: 16 days

How much: £2,050 (excl flights)

3. Japan

Journey from onsen to onsen

Japan's third-largest island, Kyushu, is bursting with natural attractions, from the volcanic peaks of Aso-Kuju NP and the waterfalls of Takachiho Gorge, to the hot springs of Kurokawa, nestled in the foothills of Mount Aso. On Audley's *Kyushu Self-drive* trip, experience all this and more, under your own steam.

Who: Audley (01993 838200, audleytravel.com)

When: Year-round (excl Jun)

How long: 17 days

How much: £3,320 (incl flights)

4. New Zealand

Go there and back again... in a car

Join DialAFlight's *Middle Earth Hobbiton Adventure* to do a virtual drive through the *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* movies. This Auckland-Queenstown roadtrip winds via the Hobbiton set, bubbling Rotorua, Tongariro NP (aka 'Mt Doom'), Mt Cook and more, with the dramatic landscapes that brought Tolkien to life ever-present out of the window.

Who: DialAFlight (0844 811 4444, dialaflight.com)

When: Year-round

How long: 13 nights

How much: £2,995 (incl flights)

5. Argentina

Cruise Argentine valleys

Follow the route of the *Tren de las Nubes*, (train of the clouds) on Steppes Travel's self-drive *Northwest Argentina* trip. After a stop in vibrant Buenos Aires, head to Salta, to drive through the UNESCO-listed Humahuaca Gorge into a world of Andean villages, rainbow hills, orange deserts, flamingoes and truly fine wines.

Who: Steppes Travel (01285 880980, steppestravel.co.uk)

When: Year-round (excl Dec-Feb)

How long: 16 days

How much: £3,995 (incl flights)

6. Tasmania

Traverse the wild west

Discover the Worlds' *Western Explorer: to the Edge of the World* trip is about getting off the beaten track in the wilderness. Explore the pristine Tarkine rainforest, look for Tasmanian devils, hit

the harbour-side village of Strahan and visit both penguin and penal colonies.

Who: Discover the World (01737 214291, discover-the-world.co.uk)

When: Year-round

How long: 9 nights

How much: £1,307 (excl flights)

7. Iceland

Blaze an icy trail

Jules Verne picked Snæfellsjökull as the start point for his *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*; see it, and you can see why. And this majestic stratovolcano is just one of the sights on Artisan Travel's *The West and Snæfellsnes* 4WD trip, along with 196m Glymur Waterfall, the long, white beach of Löngufjörur and the old horse trail and lake at Neðstavatn.

Who: Artisan Travel (01670 785085, artisantravel.co.uk)

When: Feb-Apr & Jun-Sept

How long: 7 nights

How much: £2,090 (incl flights)

8. Canada

Take a wild drive in Québec

Tick off some classic species on Wildlife Worldwide's *Québec's Bears, Whales & Moose* self-drive. Visit Saguenay Fjord to spot ghostly belugas, then head north into the vast Réserve des Laurentides to look for black bears, moose and beavers from a canoe, and to hike in the wilderness.

Who: Wildlife Worldwide (01962 302086, wildlifeworldwide.com)

When: Jun-Sept

How long: 7 nights

How much: £2,195 (incl flights)

9. Malaysia

Drive cross-country

Take Selective Asia's *Malaysia Self-Drive* tour to discover the peninsula in just nine days. Using an expressway that runs across the country, you're spoilt for stop-off choice: laidback, historic Malacca; UNESCO-listed Penang; the undulating Cameron Highlands; the Banjaran Hot Springs Retreat; foodie heaven Georgetown. It's all at your own pace, staying in heritage hotels en route.

Who: Selective Asia (01273 670001, selectiveasia.com)

When: Year-round

How long: 9 days

How much: £1,605 (incl flights)



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Inca history, alien landscapes and little-trodden trails: South America offers hikers epic experiences of glaciers, rainforests and volcanoes... often all in one route. Here's *Wanderlust's* pick of a dozen of the freshest treks out there

THE 12 BEST SOUTH AMERICA WALKS

(THAT AREN'T THE INCA TRAIL)



1 PERU HUCHUY QOSQO TREK

WHERE? Sacred Valley
LENGTH: 17km **DAYS:** 1-2

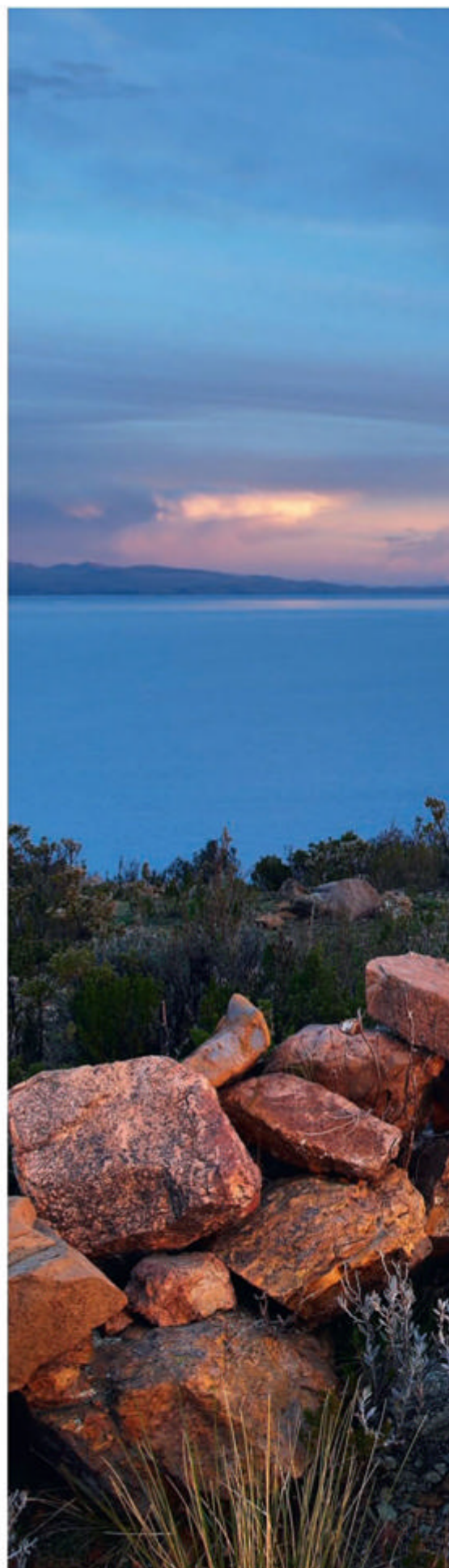
DIFFICULTY: Easy; some climbs very gentle by Andean standards ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: No time, permits or inclination to follow the infamous Inca Trail, but still fancy a leg-stretch while you're in the area? A hike to the little-known site of Huchuy Qosqo ('Little Cusco') offers plenty of Inca intrigue – those trademark stone steps, impressive ruins, a breathy pass, a dramatic canyon – minus the crowds and commitment associated with the lionised hike. The two-day route from Tambomachay to Lamay follows parts of Inca pathways that once connected Cusco to Pisac. En route you'll pass old tumbling terraces and

grazing llamas and alpacas, and you'll gain views down to lakes and up to snow peaks such as sacred Salkantay. After a night camping out in the mountains, a squeeze through the narrow Leon Punku ravine leads to the one-time administrative centre of Huchuy Qosqo, its hall, houses and recently restored granary sitting atop a 3,450m-high plateau, far from the madding crowds.

MORE INFO: Many Cusco-based tour companies offer this hike, including transfers. It can be shortened to a day-walk by starting from the village of Patabamba instead of Tambomachay.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... A three-day Lares Valley Trek: there are various possible routes here – all are far less frequented than the classic Inca Trail, and don't require permits, but encompass traditional villages and magnificent mountain scenery.



2 BOLIVIA ISLA DEL SOL TRAVERSE

WHERE? Lake Titicaca

LENGTH: 15km **DAYS:** 1 (5-6hrs)

DIFFICULTY: Easy, if acclimatised; short, but high altitude ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: There are no cars, or even roads, on this island adrift in the world's highest commercially navigable lake – just 5,000 residents, a few donkeys and some wonderful rocky walking trails. There are plenty of tourists, too, but you can escape many of them by making a long loop walk, and staying overnight – most see Sol as a day-trip destination. Hiking the coast path from Yumani, in the south, to Challapampa, in the north, then returning via the upper path,

will take you via terraced fields and pre-Columbian ruins, with views over the ethereal lake to the snow-capped Andes. Sol is also home to Puma Rock, reputedly the birthplace of Manco Capac, founder of the Incas. The walk, though not long, is literally breathtaking – the island sits at around 3,800m – so acclimatise first before making your traverse.

MORE INFO: Boats run from Copacabana to Yumani (1.5hrs) and Challapampa (2hrs). Permits are required to visit the different sections of the island; carry change to buy them from local toll booths (and beware scammers).

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... The 70km Choro Trail winds downhill from near La Cumbre, following a pre-Hispanic path through the richly biodiverse cloudforest of Bolivia's Cotapata NP. ►





3 ARGENTINA FITZ ROY LOOP

WHERE? Los Glaciares National Park

LENGTH: 35km **DAYS:** 2

DIFFICULTY: Easy-Moderate ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: Mount Fitz Roy is classic Patagonia – a jagged, utterly inhospitable-looking spire, piercing a landscape of groaning glaciers and wild, wind-whipped valleys. But, if you get lucky with the weather, there are few more jaw-dropping places to hike. A rewarding two-dayer heads from near El Chaltén to Laguna de los Tres – for fine views of 3,405m Fitz – and on to Laguna Torre, with a night camping lakeside in between. Pause at the

Piedras Blancas Glacier lookout, dig deep for the climb to Laguna de los Tres and camp by Laguna Capri; the next day, wake early to see – hopefully – the mountains daubed sunrise-pink, then continue via the Torre Valley to the lagoon, where bergs float and peaks glower. Fortunately, while Mount Torre has a reputation as being one of the world's toughest climbs, this hike is a far more manageable endeavour.

MORE INFO: El Chaltén, the region's hiking hub, is a 3hr drive from El Calafate, which has an airport; buses serve the route.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... Tackle a longer, more challenging Fitz Roy Circuit, around the massif, which involves hiking right across the region's glaciers. ►



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4 ECUADOR QUILOTOA TRAVERSE

WHERE? Central Sierra

LENGTH: 35km **DAYS:** 2-3

DIFFICULTY: Easy-Moderate; make it easier by shortening hiking days – villages are around 15km apart ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: The 200km Quilotoa Loop road links Andean villages and volcanically-sculpted countryside in remote central Ecuador. It also provides access to numerous trailheads for self-guided hikes. The trek between Quilotoa village itself and the town of Sigchos, with an overnight stop in Chugchilan and/or Isinlivi en route, offers some of the best scenery, sights and detour options, including forays down the Río Toachi Canyon, a visit to a hill fortress and even a tasting at a cheese factory. Time your walk right to hit local markets too: Sigchos on a Sunday; Guantualó on a Monday. There's more uphill involved if you walk Sigchos-Quilotoa rather than vice versa, but by doing the former you end at Quilotoa Crater Lake, a striking bowl of blue amid the mountains – a worthy finish.

MORE INFO: Daily buses run from Latacunga (on the main Pan-American Highway) to Sigchos (2hrs) and Quilotoa (2hrs).

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... The 40km Inca Trail between Achupallas and Ingapirca reveals lesser-known pathways in central Ecuador.



5 ARGENTINA PASO DE LAS NUBES

WHERE? Parque Nacional

Nahuel Huapi **LENGTH:** 23km

DAYS: 2-3 **DIFFICULTY:** Easy-Mod ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: A trek over the Pass of the Clouds packs a lot of punch into just 23km. From Pampa Linda, the route climbs through rich rainforest to the east of mighty 3,470m Monte Tronador – the highest summit in Nahuel Huapi NP,

which guards the border between Argentina and Chile. After a night spent camping en route, a descent through Valdivian forest leads to the blue glitter of Laguna Frias, where you can board a boat back to civilisation.

MORE INFO: Buses run Bariloche-Pampa Linda (1hr). Boats across Laguna Frias run to Puerto Blest, catch a bus back to Bariloche from there.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... The full Nahuel Huapi Traverse (40km) is a tougher alternative, but showcases the full glory of the park.

6 COLOMBIA LOST CITY TREK

WHERE? Sierra Nevada

LENGTH: 45km

DAYS: 5

DIFFICULTY: Moderate; no altitude problems but humidity high ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: Over 600 years older and far, far less visited than the Lost City of Machu Picchu, Colombia's Ciudad Perdida is like something out of *Tomb Raider*. Squirreled away in the jungly Sierra Nevada, the settlement was built by the Tayrona people in AD 800; it was abandoned when the conquistadores arrived and all but forgotten until the 1970s, when it was rediscovered by treasure hunters. Tourists followed, though a kidnapping in 2003 rendered the trek off-limits for a few years. Today, though, it's back on the map, so you can make the hot hike to the site via the Buritaca River, Kogi villages and coffee plantations, where 1,200 mossy steps lead to the cluster of houses, plazas, staircases, storehouses and canals perched 1,200m up in the mountains.

MORE INFO: Santa Marta, the main hub for trips into the Sierra Nevada, is served by buses from Bogotá (16hrs) and Cartagena (4hrs).

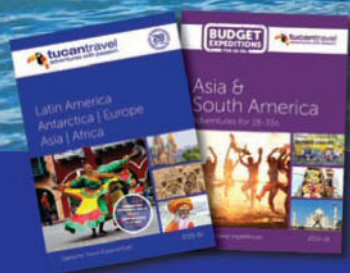
LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... The half-day hike to the Pueblito ruins in Tayrona National Park offers a Lost City-like option for those with less time. ►



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7 BRAZIL GRAND CIRCUIT

WHERE? Chapada Diamantina
LENGTH: 100km
DAYS: 5-6

DIFFICULTY: Moderate ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: Despite its size, Brazil isn't big on trekking. But the country's stand-out hike has to be the Grand Circuit of *Lost World*-like Chapada Diamantina National Park. Starting from Lençóis, the route loops up and down amid the distinctive table-top massifs, passing wide plateau, emerald valleys and dive-in-able pools. Meet the hippy alternativo residents of the Vale do Capão; admire 400m-high Cachoeira da Fumaça, one of the highest waterfalls in Brazil; detour to the stone ruins at Igatu; and keep a lookout for birds and orchids amid the foliage. Also, villages and *pousada* accommodation en route mean you don't have to spend every night under canvas.

MORE INFO: Lençóis is 400km from Salvador; buses take around 6hrs.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... Try a hike in Brazil's Chapada dos Veadeiros NP – cascades, canyons and Indian communities but also fewer tourists.

8 CHILE W TREK

WHERE? Torres del Paine
LENGTH: 60km **DAYS:** 5-7 days
DIFFICULTY: Moderate; the

weather can be bad ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: This is Patagonia's most popular trek for a reason – it combines close-up views of those classic *Cuernos* (horns) with manageable walking between comfortable mountain huts. Though not as completist-satisfying as the longer Circuit Trek, the W sticks to the mountains' south side – blessed with some of the best lookouts and, often, better weather. Taking in the park's three main valleys: the Ascensio, for those perfect granite-spire views; French Valley, where glaciers hang; and alongside Grey Lake, which leads up to the edge of the Patagonian Ice Cap. Also expect soaring condor, flamingos wading in the lagoons, and – maybe – the thrilling flash of puma.

MORE INFO: Torres del Paine is 115km from Puerto Natales; the nearest airport is at Punta Arenas, 225km from Puerto Natales.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... Got less time in Torres del Paine? Try the Lookout Trek (34km). Got more? Extend to the Circuit (130km).

9 PERU EL MISTI

WHERE? Near Arequipa
LENGTH: 25km **DAYS:** 2-3 days
DIFFICULTY: Moderate, if

acclimatised ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: At 5,822m, El Misti is only about 80m short of Kilimanjaro but if it can't claim to be the tallest on its continent, like the Tanzanian volcano, El Misti still offers non-climbers the chance to bag an impressive peak. The trek up El Misti, which looms over pretty Arequipa, is a slog-challenge rather than a technical prospect (though you might need an ice axe and crampons, depending on the season). There are several routes up its slopes of lava and ash. Base camp teeters at 4,500m; from there it's around a five-hour climb to the top, where you'll find a 10m-tall iron cross and a sulfurous crater – El Misti is still active, last erupting in 1985. In 1998, six Inca mummies were found here – you can see them at Arequipa's Museo de Santuarios Andinos. **MORE INFO:** Best to travel with a guide; tours can be arranged from nearby Arequipa. Chiguata, a popular trailhead, is a 45min drive from Arequipa. **LIKE THAT? TRY THIS...** Conquer Argentina's 6,962m Aconcagua, South America's highest. ►



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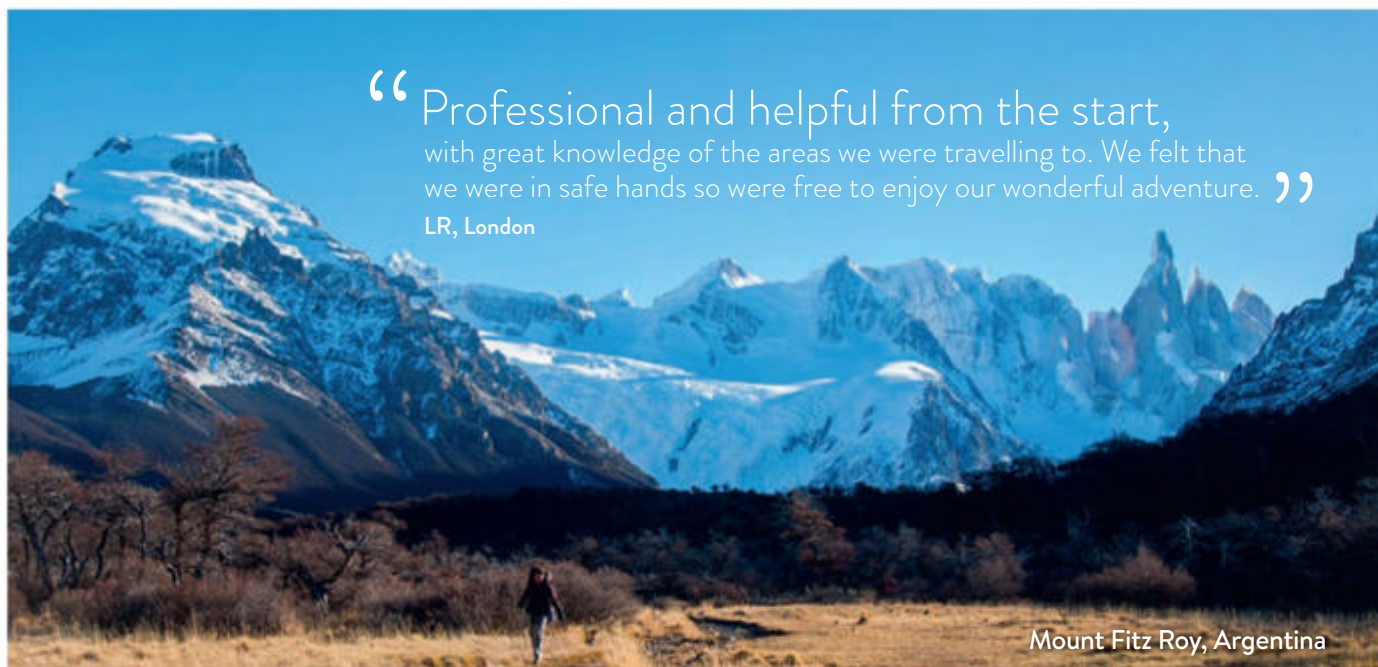
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**BOLIVIA
CONDORIRI
TREK**

WHERE? Cordillera Real
LENGTH: 42km

DAYS: 4

DIFFICULTY: Moderate-Tough ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: The Cordillera Real is a holy-moly mountain range: a gasp-inducing 120km-long swoop of glacier-cloaked granite peaks, eight of which soar over 6,000m. It's utterly wild – yet sits within boot-throwing distance of

capital, La Paz. There are lots of fine hikes here, though many – largely on account of that extreme altitude – are tough. However, if you've already spent time acclimatising to breathy Bolivia, the Condoriri Trek, from Lake Tuni to Huayna Potosi, is an excellent option.

The Condoriri is a varied mini-range within the cordillera, where you can hike amid mountains, hanging glaciers, grazing guanacos and sublime-blue lakes, making camp by the water's edge. The walking, on rough trails and sometimes snow, isn't too challenging in itself

but the passes – you'll tackle one a day – are high indeed, topping 5,000m: it's sure to test your lungs but also offer it-was-worth-it views.

MORE INFO: Lake Tuni is about 60km north of La Paz. There is no public transport but, if you are not on a guided trek, reasonably priced private transport can be arranged via agencies in the capital.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... Think you're tough, and totally acclimatised? Then try the full Transcordillera, a 12-14 day arduously amazing challenge right across the Real. ►



South America Walks

11 VENEZUELA RORAIMA

WHERE? Canaima National Park, Venezuela
LENGTH: 95km **DAYS:** 5-6

DIFFICULTY: Moderate-Tough; the big battles are with conditions and flies ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: Hiking up 2,810m Mount Roraima, the most famous of the Gran Sabana's 115 *tepuis* (table-top mountains), isn't that hard. Or at least it wouldn't be, were it not for the choking humidity, virtually daily downpours, slippery rocks and armies of jejenes, the insatiable biting sandflies that seem set on defending Roraima's flanks. But battling such adversity is one of the strange draws of a hike here; it's almost as if you have to prove your worth to be permitted access; only those who pass the tests get to enter the *Lost World* that is Roraima's plateau-summit. The atmosphere up here is eerie: it's a place of crystal valleys, carnivorous plants, ghoulish rocks and weird frogs that have developed in virtual isolation from everything else around. It's also a place where, if the tablecloth of cloud lifts, you can gaze out over Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil – Roraima marks the meeting point of the three countries.

MORE INFO: The trailhead at Paraitepui is a 28km drive off the Trans Amazonian Highway at San Francisco de Yuruaní.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... Try an alternative tepui: 2,450m Auyán-tepui is the largest in Canaima NP, with a vast summit plateau; also Angel Falls tumbles down its side.



12 PERU AUSANGATE CIRCUIT

WHERE? Cordillera Vilcanota

LENGTH: 80km **DAYS:** 5

DIFFICULTY: Tough; very high altitudes ▲▲▲▲▲

THE WALK: Imposing Ausangate (6,380m) is one of the highest peaks near Cusco, and perhaps the holiest: the local Andean people believe it is home to their gods. This trek does a circuit around it, offering up multicoloured lakes and views of mighty mountains with plenty of local culture: you'll pass traditional villages (where you can dip in a hot spring) and gaggles of ladies wearing be-tasseled flatboard hats. Best of all, it's a trek of diversity, with varied hiking across *puna* (high meadows), along valley floors, via blue-green lagoons and over lofty passes (some around 5,000m), where condors hover and fluffy viscachas scutter.

MORE INFO: The trek starts at Tinki, around 80km east of Cusco. Buses from Cusco takes 6hrs.

LIKE THAT? TRY THIS... If you're avoiding the Inca Trail, but still want to hike to Machu Picchu, try hiking there via the impressive Choquequirao ruins or along the lesser-used Salkantay Trail. ■




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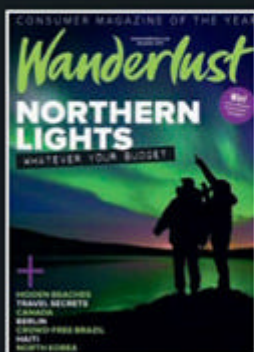
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12 Best South America Walks

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Vietnam

Chamber of secrets
Vietnam's Tu Lan Trek
involves swims through
mighty caverns



A full-page photograph of a cave interior. In the foreground, a person wearing a red life vest and a headlamp is wading through clear, greenish water. A small waterfall cascades over rocks on the left side of the frame. The cave walls are composed of layered, brownish rock formations. The lighting is dramatic, with the person's headlamp illuminating the water and the surrounding rock. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and adventurous.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Vietnam's wild, little-visited Quang Binh province is home to the world's largest cave. But that's just the headliner – there are hundreds of caverns here that, thanks to new adventure trips, you can now explore

WORDS & PHOTOS BY **DAVID W LLOYD**

Vietnam's two worlds
(clockwise) Up top,
Quang Binh province is
a lush land of hills and
paddy fields; below is an
eerie underworld where
huntman spiders creep





D

EEP inside Hung Ton Cave, a wooden ladder dropped 10m down into darkness. As I stood alone at the bottom waiting for my fellow trekkers to descend, only the faint sound of muffled voices drifted from above. I scanned with my headtorch: the slate-grey of the cave wall was punctuated with bright dots, shining like diamonds;

closer inspection revealed them to be the reflective eyes of huntsman spiders, each with leg spans as large as my outstretched hand.

As I trained my beam on a particularly large specimen, the quiet of the cave was abruptly broken. Shouts of “Snake! Snake!” came from the top of the ladder. We had been promised an Indiana Jones-style adventure and, just 30 minutes into the first of the trek’s many caves, that promise was being delivered in spades.

Welcome to the world’s biggest cave

Hang Ton sits in the wider Tu Lan Cave area in Quang Binh province, a wild region of barely penetrable jungle-clad limestone karst that occupies Vietnam’s skinny waist-land, close to the border with Laos. The area is riddled with hundreds of deep caves, including one of the largest in the world – Hang Son Doong – which contains a cavern so tall that a skyscraper could fit inside it. A jungle also thrives in its vast interior, providing a habitat for monkeys and flying foxes.

I’d been to the area before, and had met Howard and Deb Limbert, members of the British Cave Research Association. ►



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Touching the void
It's thought that many more caves may yet be discovered in Quang Binh's karst landscape

'We're talking about swimming through caverns full of fascinating formations and getting a real Indiana Jones feeling. You should try it'

◀ They were part of the team that first explored Son Doong, having been led to its mouth by local man, Mr Ho Khanh.

"When Mr Khanh spoke of the entrance to the cave, I knew we could be onto something extremely special," Howard had told me. It was the mapping of Son Doong and its opening to tourists in 2013 that was the catalyst for the establishment of Vietnam's newest adventure playground in the area around it.

Howard is a former biomedical scientist who speaks in a soft, measured Yorkshire lilt; that is, until he gets onto his favourite subject: the caves. Then, he is in his element, and it's near-impossible not to be swept along by his enthusiasm. "I've caved all over the world, but this place is special," he said. "The people I work with here are real jungle folk – they are hard, hard men, but sociable and deeply honest. Sitting around a campfire with these guys, singing and enjoying some rice wine in the evening, adds an extra layer to an expedition."

But while the massive Son Doong Cave has grabbed all the headlines and visitors, Howard, Deb and other British cavers have been busy scouting the area for alternative adventures: "I'm convinced there could be something even bigger here," said Howard. "However, it's not all about being the biggest – we've also found plenty of long, river caves for people to explore which we call the

Tu Lan adventure. We're talking about swimming through caverns full of fascinating formations and getting a real Indiana Jones feeling. You should try it."

Eden on the edge

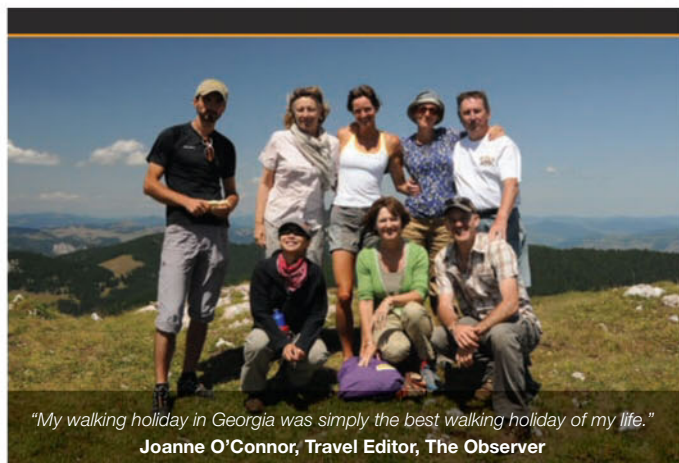
Those words were still fresh in my mind when, later that year, I travelled back to Phong Nha, the small town that is basecamp for the area's trekking adventures, with a view to tackling Tu Lan myself. I checked in at the homestay owned by the discoverer of Son Doong's entrance, Mr Ho Khanh. Not long ago, the road in front of his house was a rutted track peppered with old arms and ammo rusting in the scorching sun. Today it is smoothly paved, and his homestay business is growing. The money that the caves have brought to the town is evident.

Nearby, the road crosses the Ho Chi Minh Highway West, which snakes close to the original Ho Chi Minh Trail – a key supply artery during the Vietnam War. We turned onto a side road bordered by glowing paddy fields as gaggles of school kids wearing bright-white cottons and carrying red plastic stools weaved their way around us. Groups of farmers worked the land, their conical hats bobbing; the women hacked the crops with scythes while the men carried the bundles away. ►

Fields of gold
Around August/
September, the rice
paddies turn yellow,
signalling harvest time







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Photo: Ryan Deboodt

◀ Once we were geared up with waterproof bags, lifejackets, headtorches and other supplies, we headed toward the caves. As we walked along a muddy farm track, our guide, Bamboo, pointed out the height of the last major flood in 2010. Looking around at the flat expanse between the hills, what Bamboo described was unfathomable.

“The waters swelled to such a height that tall stilt-houses were totally submerged and countless cattle were killed,” he said. As a result, safe houses have now been built on higher ground and, in the nearby villages, numerous small huts perch on buoyant barrels, ready to be loaded with valuables should the waters rage again.

At the tail end of the dry season under a cerulean sky, the river still flowed strongly, meandering through buffalo-filled fields in the shadow of the vibrant-green hills. After a brief stop under the beating sun to photograph this Eden-like scene, we waded across the river and reached a rocky path that pitched skyward over a pass before descending into a hidden valley.

“Illegal loggers set this path up before we came here,” Bamboo explained, pointing out the planks of wood they used to drag up timber. “They would use motorcycle-engine-powered winches to haul massive pieces of wood from the jungle.” Illegal logging and hunting for animals is still rife in the area, but the jobs provided through tourism are doing much to make the practice less of a necessity.

Going down

Before long we arrived at the mouth of the first cave: Hang Ton. Safety instructions were issued, then we cautiously stepped into the darkness. Grouped together at the bottom of a 6m-long ladder, a hush descended. In the daylight, conversation had flowed, but in

the eerie darkness we stood quietly, training our torch beams on the glistening rock formations around us. As we approached the river that flows inside the cavern, the only sound was the drip-drip of droplets falling from stalactites onto the water’s surface.

Following Bamboo’s lead, we dropped our bags into the water and rolled onto our backs to swim slowly, slowly deeper into the cave. Bats swooped and dived, feeding on the thousands of tiny flies illuminated by the torch light. After a few hundred metres the sound of rushing water grew more intense as we reached the cave’s exit. The sense of discovery on emerging was even more palpable than that inside. Already in a remote part of Vietnam, we now found ourselves in what seemed like another world, emerging on a beach fronted by an impossibly pretty turquoise lake, which was fed by a waterfall thundering from the cave mouth.

The next cave we were to tackle was discovered by chance by a Dutch tourist named Kim. Also on the Tu Lan Trek, he’d sauntered off to find a quiet spot to relieve himself, away from the lagoon, and found what was subsequently christened ▶

‘A hush descended. In the eerie darkness we stood quietly, training our torch beams on the glistening rock formations around us’



The earth's insides
Quang Binh's caves drip with weird and wonderful minerals and formations



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Journey's end
After a hot jungle hike back to civilisation, it's only right to celebrate with a plate of delicious barbecue pork



◀ **Kim Cave.** We swam through the chamber's river to reach our campsite for the night: tents and hammocks had already been set up on the edge of an emerald-green lagoon.

With time for one more adventure before supper, we swam across the water to Tu Lan Cave, after which the whole two-day adventure is named. Inside, we ducked and weaved amid a labyrinth of stalactites, stalagmites and columns, sometimes having to pass backpacks through first in order to squeeze by.

The cavern then opened up to reveal a bizarre set of shelves formed over thousands of years and containing almost perfectly round balls of calcium – cave pearls. Surrounding this, the walls were laced with a golden, glistening mineral and yet more shining eyes of innumerable huntsman spiders.

What else lies beneath?

Back at the campsite, we freshened up in the waterfall's plunge pool as the sun sank swiftly behind the hills. Ravenous, we feasted on tender pork barbecued on spits over open flames accompanied by a local speciality dipping sauce of lime leaves, lime juice, garlic and chilli. With a glass or two of lethally strong rice wine, we kicked back to watch the stars. As we lazed, Bamboo pointed out two pairs of twinkling dots in the bushes – the eyes of flying foxes, quietly observing us from a distance.

After a well-earned sleep – some of us in tents, others opting for swaying hammocks – we made our way into the massive arch of Ken Cave and lowered ourselves into its dark river waters. Reaching the final stop of the two-day journey also involved its hardest swim, paddling 150m against the current. We re-grouped at the foot of a steep climb and ventured upward in single file before reaching a sheer drop-off.

In front of us was a colossal column formed by the meeting of a stalactite and stalagmite. By now we'd seen tens of columns, but this one was in a league of its own. Photographs of what stood before us went viral a couple of years ago, so we had all seen it before, but we were still taken aback by its sheer scale and the surreal morphing of orange and cream hues on its richly textured surfaced.

The final cave tackled, we shed our lifejackets, helmets and headlamps and prepared for the trek back to base. For some, this proved the most challenging aspect of the trip, with the path climbing steeply through dense, primary forest in hot, steamy conditions. In places the thin, slippery trail snaked around vertiginous deep drop-offs – this was not a place where you wanted to put a foot wrong.

After a couple of hours we found ourselves back at the river that we'd waded across the morning before, and over-heated members of the group collapsed gratefully into its cooling flow. Later, exhausted but content back at the Tu Lan base, we swiftly emptied its fridge of cold beers.

An uncertain future

That evening I went out for dinner with Chau A Nguyen, founder of Oxalis Adventure Tours, which runs the Tu Lan Trek. The day before, Chau and his team had been in the nearby city of Dong Hoi, anxiously waiting to hear whether the local authorities would allow tours of Son Doong to continue. When we met, the good news was writ large on his face. Chau spoke of his pride at helping develop the area from a tourist backwater – but he also voiced his fears for the future.

There are now plans for a cable car project in the area, which would take people right to the mouth of Hang Son Doong. This would transform the town of Phong Nha as well as the UNESCO-listed cave area. Tourist numbers would sky-rocket, and there are fears that the construction itself would have a devastating impact on the environment. On the flip-side, investors argue that cable cars have been built at sites of outstanding natural beauty before and that the project would inject much-needed capital into this relatively poor province.

For now though, this is a region that remains pristine and ripe with the promise of adventure. And with Howard and Chau talking about the potential discovery of even more lengthy caves hidden deep in within these hills, who knows what adventures are still waiting to be revealed. ■

Vietnam Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Hanoi
Population: 90.4 million
Language: Vietnamese, French
Time: GMT+7
International dialling code: +84
Visas: Required by UK nationals. The safest way is to arrange your visa in advance via vietnamembassy.org.uk; visa fees from £54 (single entry; five day wait). An alternative is to apply for a visa entry letter from an agent – be wary of bogus operators – and then pay US\$45 on arrival in Vietnam.
Money: Dong (VND), currently around 33,300VND to the UK£. If you buy your visa on arrival, be sure to have the fee in US dollars. VND vending ATMs are available at international airports.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Cooler weather** in Phong Nha.
- Weather is **pleasant and drier**, with warmer temperatures.
- Warmer weather**, an abundance of butterflies and vibrant paddy fields.
- Summer:** high temperatures make for steamy trekking. Rice turns yellow; harvest begins in Sept. Expect rains (even more than usual), Sept-Oct. Treks to Tu Lan run year-round apart from Oct.

Health & safety

The Phong Nha is low-risk for malaria. Hepatitis A and tetanus vaccinations are recommended. Crime against tourists is almost unheard of.

Further reading & information

Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos Handbook (Footprint – 2015 edition out in April)
Vietnam (Lonely Planet, 2014)
vietnamtourism.com Official tourist board site

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- ◆ **Vietnam travel guide**

THE TRIP

i The author trekked with **Oxalis Adventure Tours** (oxalis.com.vn). Its two-day Tu Lan Cave Encounter costs 5,500,000VND (£170) including all food, water, camping and guiding. The author's transport within Vietnam was arranged by **Buffalo Tours** (020 8545 2830, buffalotours.com); travelling from Hanoi to Phong Nha and back via private transfer and rail costs from US\$250 (£164).

Getting there

✈ Direct flights to Vietnam from the UK are operated by **Vietnam Airlines** (020 3263 2062, vietnamairlines.com). Return flights from the UK to Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City start from around £600; flight time is around 11.5 hours.
From Hanoi, the **daily overnight bus** from Hanoi to Phong Nha costs 300,000VND. Alternatively, trains to Dong Hoi depart every day (442,000VND (£14); advance booking advised; see seat61.com for information on services, bookings and English-speaking agents). Train tickets can also be booked via Buffalo Tours or Oxalis. From Dong Hoi train station, Phong Nha is a 45 minute journey by car; a private transfer can be booked with Oxalis for 660,000VND (£20).
Alternatively, Vietnam Airlines flies to Dong Hoi from Hanoi, taking around one hour; from 1,520,000VND (£48).

Getting around

🚗 In Phong Nha, the base for the cave treks, the best way to get around is by **bicycle** (from around £1 a day, or free from many guesthouses). Alternatively, you can hire a motorbike with a local driver from **Thang's Motorbikes** in Phong Nha for £10 a day; book via Easy Tiger Hostel (easytigerhostel.com).

Cost of travel

£ Vietnam has something for everyone, from backpackers to those looking to spend big. However, **in Phong Nha there are no high-end options** and everything is cheap, from food to accommodation: US\$60 (£39) a day should suffice here. **Tipping is not expected** in restaurants, but is often appreciated. It is a good idea to tip the guides and porters on any excursion.

Accommodation

🛏 **Ho Khanh's Homestay** (phong-nha-homestay.com) offers simple, fan-only rooms with a shared bathroom, run by the man who discovered the world's largest cave. The riverside location and breakfasts are amazing. Doubles cost 600,000VND (£18).
Also in town, the **Easy Tiger Hostel** (easytigerhostel.com) is the number-

Imperially imposing
The elaborate entrance of the UNESCO-listed Citadel at Hue



one place for young backpackers; dorm beds cost from 160,000VND (£5).

For more comfort, stay at the **Phong Nha Farmstay** (phong-nha-cave.com). Located 8km from town, amid swathes of paddy fields, this Aussie/Vietnamese-run place has a good kitchen, a wide range of accommodation options and a welcoming vibe; doubles cost from 700,000VND (£22), family rooms from 1,000,000VND (£31).

Food & drink

🍴 In Phong Nha town, the tastiest option is **The Best BBQ Pork Shop in the World... Probably**, on the main road by the market – just look for the sign. For just a few pounds you'll enjoy pork belly that lives up to its billing along with noodle and rice dishes. Another popular spot is **Tuan Ngoc** (opposite Easy Tiger in Phong Nha town), where the friendly husband-and-wife team serve a broad array of Vietnamese classics.

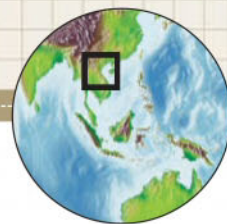
What to pack

🧳 For the caving trek, pack **long, lightweight trousers and quick-drying tops** – sports T-shirts are ideal. Also consider bringing your own water bottles. Trekking boots are supplied, but **trail shoes** or other grippy shoes with good drainage are ideal as they are lightweight and comfortable to walk and swim in. Also be sure to bring mosquito repellent.

VIETNAM HIGHLIGHTS

1 Tu Lan Cave

This system actually lies outside the boundary of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, which is in itself extremely worthy of exploration. Attractions including Paradise Cave, Dark Cave and Nuoc Mooc Springs are also nearby.



2 Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

The DMZ saw some of the most brutal battles during the conflict with the USA due to its position along the 17th Parallel (at the Ben Hai River). Tours to this region can be arranged from Phong Nha.

3 Bach Ma National Park

A French hill station was established here in 1932 and at one point the site was home to 139 villas, plus a hotel. It was not until 1991 that it gained national park status. The highest peak here reaches 1,448m; the surrounding hills are home to rhododendron-filled woodland and mammals such as the red-shanked douc langur. Basic accommodation is available and treks to waterfalls can be undertaken independently or with a guide.

4 Hue

To the south of Bach Ma lies the former capital city of Hue (pictured above), which is surrounded by the

magnificent mausoleums of former emperors and mandarins. The grand citadel complex in the heart of the city is a particular draw.

5 Lang Co

This fishing village, south of Hue, is set on a wonderfully pretty lagoon on which floating fish restaurants serve excellent, cheap fresh food. There are a number of resorts, including the upmarket beachfront Banyan Tree and more affordable ocean-view options.

6 Danang

Further south, over the dramatic Hai Van Pass – one of the most beautiful stretches of road in Vietnam – Danang is a forward-looking city with beautiful beaches right on its doorstep as well as the densely forested Son Tra Peninsula. Danang is also a foodie's delight, with a fantastic street-food scene and mouth-watering seafood restaurants.

5 THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN

1 Take your own footwear Oxalis gives out Cambodian army boots for trekkers, but fell running or grippy off-road running shoes work brilliantly, plus are lightweight and drain water quickly. And don't forget a pair of flip-flops for campside evenings.

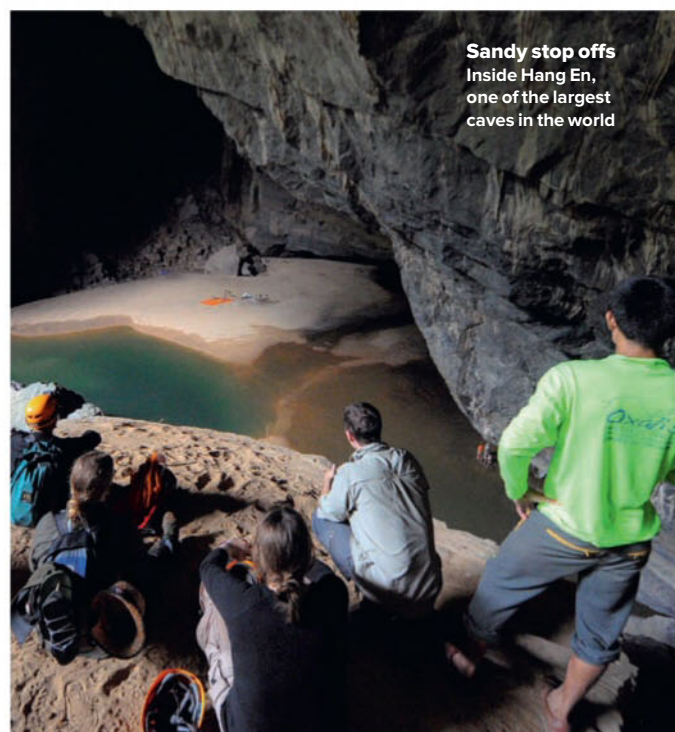
2 Bring your bins Anyone interested in birdlife should definitely take a pair of binoculars – sightings of eagles are common, plus you might even spot flying squirrels or even monkeys in-and-around the caves and Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP.

3 Pack light, pack dry One pair of dry clothes is all you should need on the one night trek, so don't weigh yourself

down. Also, although Oxalis provides waterproof bags, it's a good idea to take your own and double-up.

4 Stay longer Take the excellent Hai's Eco Conservation Tour (900,000VND (£28) – book at the Bamboo Café); check out the Nuoc Mooc Eco-Trail; and cycle a loop of the Pub With Cold Beer and the Wild Boar Eco Farm with the brilliant Private Shi of Phong Nha Adventure Cycling (www.phongnhacycling.jimdo.com).

5 Hold steady – take a tripod If you want to get a good picture inside the caves, you will need a tripod and a camera with a long exposure setting.




Sandy stop offs
Inside Hang En, one of the largest caves in the world



THE BEST KIND OF CRAZY

WORDS PHOEBE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHS NEIL S PRICE

Alpine summer
Leaving the peak of Valluga
for a hut-to-hut adventure
in Austrian Tirol, and before
you ask – it's July

A photograph of two hikers ascending a steep, rocky mountain slope covered in patches of snow. The hiker in the foreground is wearing a red jacket, black pants, and a white beanie, carrying a large red backpack and using trekking poles. The hiker behind is wearing a dark jacket and black pants, also using trekking poles. The background shows jagged, snow-dusted rock peaks under a cloudy sky. In the foreground, a large rock features a red and white painted trail marker.

Imagine not only walking in the Alps but staying in the mountains too, with a comfy bed, a hot meal and warming schnaps – for around €20 a night. Just keep your fingers crossed for good weather...



C

hamois are crazy. In driving storms, snow and wind these creatures climb high into the Alps, teetering on precarious ledges and tightrope-walking on knife-edge ridges, all in search of food. My guide Erich Schweiger – aka Naggi – told me all about these hybrid antelope/goats as we stood on a rocky path, 1,000m above the Austrian town of

St Anton, fumbling around in our rucksacks trying to find our waterproofs as rain blew in our faces. “Yep,” said Naggi, gesticulating somewhere towards the mist, “crazy.”

The irony wasn’t lost on me as we, too, continued on in the driving rain, guided by our bellies, heading to Leutkircher Hütte for lunch.

In the Tirolean Alps – and in particular here in the Lechtaler range – mountain huts are spaced regularly along the trails, offering dorm beds and hot food. This means that you can stay high among the mountains, connecting walking paths to form a hut-to-hut adventure, without the need to carry heavy camping gear or return to villages for supplies. Some huts are even open in winter for emergency un-staffed use.

It wasn’t winter now. In fact it was mid-July – a time free from the hedonistic crowds that descend on St Anton in ski season, leaving the granite peaks to walkers. My plan had been to explore this winter wonderland snow-free, bathed in summer sunshine, spending my days strolling from hut to hut. St Anton, it seemed, had other ideas.

“I’m not saying a bad storm,” said Naggi when we’d met earlier that morning, “but – it’s the mountains, anything could happen.”

Indeed it could. The day before, I had arrived in town to find the sky overcast; the threat of thunder brewed in the air, and the clouds churned as though being stirred in a cauldron. I had taken a bus into the nearby Verwall Valley and meandered among grey cows and rows of purple and pink *orchis* to find Konstanzer Hütte, my first introduction to a mountain shelter. Spits of rain fell sporadically as I walked, clouds swarming around the peaks, but by the time I left the hut to return to St Anton, the sky was blue, the sun burning through intensely, forcing me to remove layers. That night I was buzzing at the thought of my forthcoming trek.

Shelter from the storm

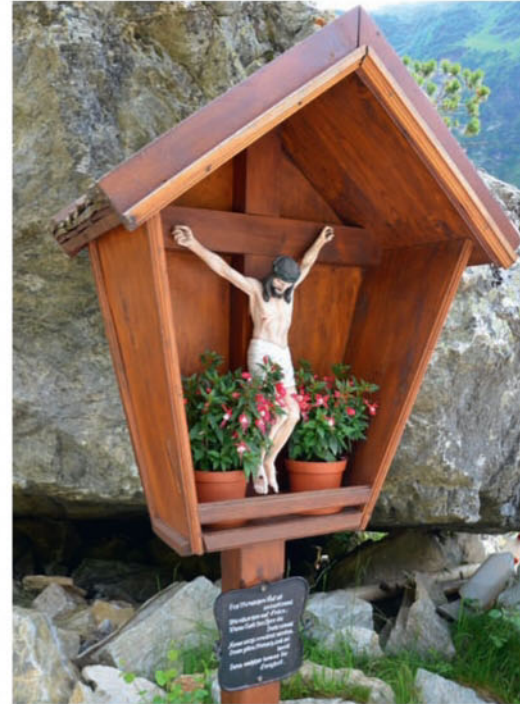
Then next morning I met Naggi and almost on cue the rain started. Trying to ignore the worsening weather we headed for the ski lifts. Walking in the mountains of a ski town offers two main perks. The first is that when places are better known for winter sports, in summer they’re much quieter and cheaper. The second is that the ski lift infrastructure makes it easier to get up into the high places to start a walk, saving your legs hundreds of metres of ascent.

We jumped in a cable car to Valluga, the highest peak in the mountain range at 2,811m. As we passed the 2,000m mark, the views of green meadows and wildflowers disappeared, swallowed by thick fog. I looked over to Naggi, who was busy humming to himself, avoiding my gaze. When we finally reached the top, I stepped out into winter. Snow lay banked up the stairs to the walking path; I half wondered if we would need skis to get down.

“It might improve as we head along the path – we’ll be descending a little,” said Naggi optimistically. We began plunging our legs into the knee-deep snow, using walking poles for balance. ►



Calm before the storm
(clockwise from below)
 Religious markers in the
 Verwall Valley; huts point to
 more huts near Ansbacher;
 grey Tirolean cows; heading
 back to St Anton in the
 sunshine; Meinhard Egger
 plays in Leutkircher Hütte



Austria



◀ Despite this rather rude winter intrusion I found the silence it brought with it comforting. No one else had ventured up here yet, so each stride was on a pristine covering, each footstep imprinted with a muted squeak. At first we barely spoke, overcome with the drama of a mountain winter. But as we lost height en route to Kapall, a food-only hut, the snow gave way to more grass, and finally we gained views down the ridgeline and over into St Anton's neighbouring villages. "We may get good weather yet," Naggi said hopefully as we looked out over the sun-dappled peaks.

We continued, climbing high towards the peak of Bacherspitze. The views had gone, stolen by the cloud again. The path narrowed to a stony ledge, our way marked by the red-and-white stripes of the Austrian flag.

This region may have been where skiing was born. In walking terms, however, its claim to fame is the Adlerweg, aka the Eagle's Way. Linking St Anton and St Johann, the route comprises 1,480km of pathways that, when plotted on a map, look like an eagle's outstretched wings. We were treading a section of that trail now, following it as it cut under rocky flanks. Every now and again we spotted chamois droppings, and Naggi would talk about the animals' endless pursuit of food on the mountain tops.

Rain began to fall harder and faster, and my tummy rumbled in anticipation of lunch. The terrain flattened to a kind of plateau and,

sure enough, the roof of Leutkircher Hütte came into view, its white walls and wooden shutters looking particularly inviting in the hail.

According to Naggi, the first mountain hut in this range was built around 1912 by the Alpine Club of Germany, who own most of the huts here today. They bought land from Austria and built hikers' huts all over the mountains. Now, most of the huts are still German-owned but employ local managers to run them in the summertime.

The manager at Leutkircher was Meinhard Egger, who greeted us with a big smile and a schnaps. We headed to the main room and began peeling off our wet jackets while Meinhard lit the stove. His family were gathered in the kitchen; the hut's been in their care for over 70 years.

"When we first arrive for the season we get a helicopter to bring in supplies," explained Meinhard as he lavished the table with steaming soup and dumplings, hot chocolate and shots of rum. "It takes six flights to start the season then we have two more over the summer for gas, wood, food and of course beer."

I felt the burn of the alcohol heat my chest as Meinhard talked about some of his mountain escapades and leafed through old books showing me photographs of the areas in which he'd climbed. Then he left the room, returning with an accordion to treat us to a traditional Tirolean tune.

We left hours later than we'd planned, fuelled by food, some good conversation and just a little rum. It was starting to snow ▶

Flowers and flurries

Orchids line the path lower down the mountain as do painted Austrian flag markers (*far top left*); St Anton begins to disappear into clouds (*left*) en route to the Leutkircher Hütte (*bottom left*) and the snow arrives at Valluga (*bottom right*)



‘We left hours later than we planned, fuelled by food, good conversation and just a little rum’



◀ heavily; the only colour came from the odd posy of wildflowers, bright against the white.

“Schnaps,” said Naggi as we passed a cluster of blue. They were *enzian* (trumpet gentian), which are used to make the alcoholic drink; their petals – Naggi was quick to show me – are shaped like shot glasses.

We ploughed on over snow-plastered rocks and ice-encrusted mud banks for several hours. Despite my earlier hearty lunch I began to dream about my hot evening meal. I felt crazier than the chamois, our bitterly cold pursuit of food taking us higher into the storm. By the time we reached Kaiserjochhaus, the hut where we were to spend the night, the grass was frozen in a pallid coat.

Relief swept over me as we first passed the satellite winter hut – ironically closed for the summer. By now the thought of a warm fire had me practically running to the main building. Inside, our hosts let us hang our kit around the stove as we sat and feasted on a hearty pan-fried mix of potatoes, onions and eggs.

As night drew in, more walkers arrived, driven to abandon their camping and walking by the bad weather. The air steamed with the drying of damp clothes, and faces were ruddy from the fire’s heat and the friendly conversations. It felt great to be in the thick of the dramatic mountain weather but at the same time sheltered from it.

Retiring to the dorm that night, Naggi looked out of the window and muttered to himself, while I snuggled under my fleecy blanket and hoped the summer would return.

And the schnaps began to flow...

“Ten centimetres,” said Naggi as I peered outside the next morning and found my guide looking at the swirling snowstorm. Next to him a man stood red-faced and shaking. He had set off early to try to attempt the route we were supposed to tackle and had to retreat due to avalanche risk. Summer, it seemed, had never been further away.

We sat within the comfort of the four walls a little longer, our cosy refuge amid the storm, and unfolded the map on the table. “What if we go down to the village, then pick up another path to take us to our next hut more directly?” I suggested. Naggi smiled.

And so, determined to continue with our hut-to-hut mission, we took one of the escape routes and descended into the valley; the grass became green once more and the pinks of the alpine roses waved in the wind. We walked out into the pretty town of Pettneu and caught a bus to Flirsch, for the start of a path up to our final hut of Ansbacher.

The track was slick with rain and the musty, damp scent of the forest rose from the ground as we began to climb away from the

Walk like a chamois*(from left to right)*

The welcome site of Kaiserjochhaus in the snow storm; blue enzian flowers used to make schnaps; 'crazy' chamois; even crazier walkers; the black Alpine salamanders predict more rain



houses. Alpine salamanders – curious little black amphibians – dotted the path, all seemingly heading up. “Damn,” said Naggi as he watched them, “heading uphill means more rain.”

We emerged from the trees and paused to catch our breath. An eagle swooped and dived like a corkscrew, descending to the forest. Somewhere behind me I heard the whistle of a marmot and turned to see its furry behind disappear into its labyrinth underground.

As the rain turned to snow once more we made a final push for the hut. Sheep surrounded us as we topped out above a gouged valley edged by more pointy hills; they sniffed the ground and looked unconcerned by the ice. “They have a good life up here,” said Naggi. As I looked out at the serrated surrounds, wild and seemingly never-ending, I couldn’t help but agree. We climbed up along the nose of a smaller peak, and finally reached the brown-roofed Ansbacher Hütte, tired from the ski-lift free ascent but happy to have made it.

The hut was being tended by a young family, the three children running around excitedly as we cleaned our boots. Inside I clutched a hot chocolate and leafed through an Alpine Club book, settling on the photograph of a woman who had been a member for 81 years. There was a picture of her climbing in 1905; one of her later, in this very hut; then a final one of her at the age of 100, still walking.

Soon someone had the guitar down from the wall and the schnaps began to flow, while tales of walking escapades past, present and still to come were told. Outside the snow continued to fall.

Up with the crazies

The final morning started in a white cloud, flakes still drifting and the mercury struggling to rise above zero. It was time for our mountain adventure to head back down to the valley. We were bound for the town of Schnann, by way of a breakfast stop at the lower Fritz Hütte, to catch the bus back to St Anton.

As we began to descend, the powder soft at my feet and wet on my face, Naggi stopped dead in his tracks. He gestured at the mountain slopes to my right, the rocks just visible through a break in the cloud. “Look,” he whispered.

Chamois. Two of them, standing tall and proud on the rocky ledge as the snow flurried around them. They may be called crazy but, as I watched them climb higher into the mist, I reasoned that being like them was no bad thing. Because following their bellies uphill took them into the beautiful and unpredictable beauty of the mountains and that, I reckoned, made them the most sensible creatures in the world. 🐾



Austrian Tirol Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Innsbruck
Population: 722,000
Languages: German
Time: GMT+1 (Mar–Nov GMT+2)
International dialling code: +43
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Euro (€), currently around €1.30 to the UK£. ATMs available in St Anton. Credit cards accepted at many places in towns; take cash for the huts.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- **Summer:** often warm and sunny, perfect for walking. Be prepared though – snow can fall at any time. Catered huts all open.
- **Winter:** lots of snow, sunny skies. High season for snow sports. Huts closed but emergency huts open (no catering). Hotels in St Anton must be pre-booked.
- **Shoulder seasons.** Snow possible, weather changeable. Reduced services and openings; some huts closed.

Health & safety

Tap water is safe to drink but stream water should be sterilised (by boiling or treatment tablets). Walking in the mountains has inherent risks: pack appropriate equipment (warm layers, waterproofs) and the right footwear.

Make sure your travel insurance covers hiking in areas up to 3,000m. In an emergency, contact Mountain Rescue by calling 140. Download the free Mountain Rescue Tirol Emergency App (tyrol.com).

Further reading & information

Austria (Lonely Planet, 2014)
Walking in Austria (Cicerone, 2009) by Kev Reynolds
stantonamarlberg.com – St Anton information
tyrol.com – Tirol Tourist Board

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 ♦ A lavish hiking trip in Austria – issue 103
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THE TRIP



Getting there

EasyJet (easyjet.com) flies direct from Bristol, London Gatwick and Liverpool to Innsbruck year-round. Flight time is around two hours; fares from £70 return. Alternatively, **take the train**. London–Innsbruck is possible, travelling via Paris, Munich and Salzburg – see www.seat61.com.



Getting around

To get to St Anton, **hire a car at Innsbruck airport** (2hr drive). Alternatively, **trains** run from Innsbruck to Bregenz, via St Anton. Journey time is around one hour; fares start at €15.90 (£12) one way (www.oebb.at). In St Anton, everything is walkable.



Cost of travel

Prices in St Anton and the Tirol region are in line with those in most European cities. In winter, hotel rates rocket but **in summer there are bargains** to be had. Expect to pay upwards of €40 (£30) for a basic room, around €150 (£112) for something more luxurious.

Chairlifts run year-round. In summer, chairlift passes for hikers, available in three- to seven-day denominations, are available, from €33 (£25); single-journey tickets are available: €13 (£9.75) for an ascent, €8.50 (£6.35) for a descent.

To access the walking routes around Konstanzer Hütte, take Bus Line 6 Verwall from St Anton Terminal. **Buses run about eight times a day** (timetables are available from the St Anton Tourist Office); one-way fares cost from €2.80. Take the bus there and walk back.



Accommodation

Pre- and post-huts the author stayed at **Hotel Rundeck** (hotelrundeck.at), located in the middle of town, close to the chairlifts. Doubles from €47 (£35) in summer; in peak winter season, doubles

from €115 (£86). **There are 15 mountain huts** in the Lechtaler Alps. Prices vary but expect to pay from €20 (£15) pppn. Food and drink is more expensive in huts than in town (eg around €6 (£4.50) for soup and bread) – you are, after all, paying towards getting it up there. **Pre-booking is strongly advised** – for contacts and locations see www.tinyurl.com/mountainhuts.



Food & drink

There is plenty of traditional Austrian/German cuisine available:

schnitzel (meat fried in bread crumbs), **savoury pancakes, soup and dumplings, and goulash** – all hearty and calorific hiking fodder. In towns, the usual pizza/burger options are also available, as are Chinese and Italian restaurants. In the mountain huts you're unlikely to get away without sampling the local **schnaps** (fruit spirit), a great way to warm up.

In town expect to pay €15–20 (£11–15) for a two or three course meal, €4 (£3) for a beer and €3.50 (£2.60) for a coffee, but **more in the mountain huts**.



FIVE THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN HUT-TO-HUTTING

1 Huts get cold

Pack a warm jacket to wear in the evening when you're sitting around in the social areas – even in summer.

2 Practise good blanket etiquette

Huts provide blankets. The *fußende* (foot end) will be labelled – for hygiene reasons, use them the right way round.

3 Pack a pillow

One slim pillow is provided, so you should take an inflatable pillow if you need something more substantial.

4 Washrooms are basic

Bathrooms are often communal and usually only have a row of sinks – don't expect hot showers (though some huts offer these for additional payment). Wear merino baselayers or synthetics with odour control for multi-day walks.

5 Pack extra trousers Your walking trousers and socks may get damp during the day. Take a lightweight pair of leggings/linen trousers, plus spare socks, to relax in at the hut while your others dry.





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SOUND OF SALZBURG

The best way to arrive in Salzburg is by train: meandering from Munich via the Bavarian countryside, you'll get a peek into Austria's dramatic landscapes. Salzburg itself is a collection of Baroque spires and rolling hills. The city is renowned for its lead role in *The Sound of Music*. Film fans visit many of the musical's sites, including the perfectly manicured Mirabell Gardens, where the Von Trapp children sang and danced.

Then there's Mozart, born here in 1756. The city pays homage to the composer at every

turn; you can visit the Mozart Birthplace Museum or even snack on Mozartkugel, a confection of marzipan, nougat and chocolate. Not that you'll go hungry here – Salzburg has the highest concentration of gourmet dining options in Austria.

If you've time, ride the Salzkammergutbahn to the World Heritage site of Hallstatt, in the Austrian Lake District. The town is full of quirky architecture, framed by lakes and mountains, and is a great base for bathing, hiking, cycling, caving and relaxing.

INTO INNSBRUCK

From Salzburg, the slow train to Innsbruck lets you chug past the glorious glaciers of Zell am See. You'll soon reach the ancient city, first settled in the Stone Age. Innsbruck is equally as beautiful during its snowy winters and its sunny summers (not to mention flower-filled spring and glowing autumn). Take a stroll through avenues of the medieval Old Town, visit the Renaissance Ambras Castle, and take in the lavish Baroque Cathedral of St James. It's the perfect end to the ultimate scenic trip.

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Railbookers is offering you and a friend the chance to win a 4 night trip into Austria by rail. The prize includes flights, accommodation and rail transport. To enter, simply, answer the following:

Q: Which Austria-based musical is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year?

- a) The Sound of Music
- b) Les Misérables
- c) Cats

To enter and for full terms & conditions, go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions. Send your answer to the Wanderlust office (address p2). The closing date is 18 March 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or sponsors.



For more information visit www.railbookers.com or call 020 3327 2417

TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert
with our travel know-how



The Black Sun
see p73

■ **This month's experts include:** Mountain instructor Rob Johnson, p70 ♦
Walk leader John Cousins, p73 ♦ Cruise king Adam Coulter, p74 ♦ Train travel
tipster Kate Andrews, p74 ♦ Hike-health guru Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p76 ♦

On a high
There's nothing
like trekking in the
mountains – but
you need to be
prepared



■ *The Wanderlust Masterclass*

Beginners' guide to mountain treks

Trekking in a mountain environment throws up a variety of challenges, from altitude to fitness issues. Though treks vary, depending where you go, all will require pre-trip preparation to ensure you have the best experience. So where do you begin?

Get fit

You don't have to be an Olympic athlete, but for a trek of easy to moderate difficulty a reasonable level of hill-walking fitness is required. "Not only do you need to be able to walk for several hours a day, you need to do it

day after day," says Carey Davies, hill-walking officer for the British Mountaineering Council (BMC; thebmc.co.uk). "A summer of walking up your local hills when you can, interspersed with some midweek exercise, should do the trick."

Mountaineering instructor Stuart Johnson (climbmts.co.uk), who is training officer for Mountain Rescue Scotland, describes a good fitness pace as being able to walk and talk at the same time without feeling "completely knackered". Rob Johnson, an instructor who leads treks in North Wales and overseas (expeditionguide.com), adds: "The fitter you are, the more you will enjoy any trip."

Spend as much time as possible walking pre-trip, ideally on undulating terrain or bagging summits. Also aim for three sessions of aerobic exercise a week. "Swimming is particularly good as it is a low-impact all-round workout," says Rob, "but cycling and brisk walking are equally suitable."

Whatever exercise you choose, start training early – at least four weeks before your first mountain trek suggests Stuart. Gradually build your strength and stamina.

Health considerations

Mountain trekking does come with health risks: think altitude sickness, sunstroke,

'A good fitness pace is being able to walk and talk at the same time without feeling completely knackered – and the fitter you are, the more you will enjoy any trip'

dehydration, hypothermia and blisters.

Tackle all of these issues by being prepared.

Walking at altitude is the biggest shock to the system. Altitude sickness or acute mountain sickness (AMS) is when the fine tissues in your lungs and head start to leak. People can suffer from AMS from 2,000m above sea level; early warning signs include headache, a bad cough, breathlessness, dizziness and/or double vision. Being physically fit, eating plenty of carb-packed calories and drinking lots of water all help, but the best prevention technique is ascending slowly. "Take a leaf out of the late, great English mountaineer Don Whillans' book and do the very minimum you can get away with while you acclimatise," advises Rob. If you do start to suffer with symptoms of AMS, you should descend immediately and seek medical attention.

Overheating is also a concern. "For hot days always wear a sun hat, sun screen and sunglasses," advises Stuart. "You can still dehydrate in cold conditions too, so ensure you keep a steady core body temperature." Eat healthily and drink plenty of water, although be careful not to flush out valuable electrolytes. Purify water when necessary (see 'How to source clean water'; issue 150).

Navigating

If you're serious about trekking, consider navigation training.

"A one-day course will develop your trip planning knowledge, and teach you the skills of map and compass reading," explains Stuart. Most courses will cover safe use of phone apps and GPS devices too – as well as warning of their limitations.

Training is particularly useful for overseas hiking says Carey: "In some countries the quality of maps is not brilliant. And even on a led trek it [navigation training] will improve your safety and enhance your enjoyment."

In case of emergency

Trekking safety is about common sense, but some things – such as freak weather and accidents – are out of your control.

When you head out into the hills, always

leave your itinerary with someone reliable; so if something does go wrong, someone will know where you are and can raise the alarm.

Keep calm and take time to assess when in dire situations. "Work out your exact position using your map or GPS and write it down," recommends Stuart. "Descend to safety: is there a safe way down? Can you find shelter? Are you injured? Can you get out of the wind? If you can't move, send a friend to get help or call if you have a phone signal."

In the UK, dial 999; ask for police, then mountain rescue. Even if you have no network coverage you may still be able to get emergency services. Carey adds: "Always know the emergency number in the trek's host country." Travel insurance may cover costs if you have to be evacuated, depending how high you trek so check your policy pre-trip.

Get equipped

Choosing the right footwear is essential: you need sturdy boots that are appropriate for the conditions you'll be trekking in. Wear these on all your training walks.

Wear layers so you can easily add or remove items as the weather requires. Look for light, high-wicking and quick-drying clothes. Buy a good outer shell jacket that is water- and wind-proof, plus gloves and a hat.

Other key items include a tent (if this isn't being supplied), a first aid kit, hydration system (waterbottles and/or bladder) and a backpack. "Selecting a rucksack is important," stresses Stuart. "Think about the fit, comfort and capacity. Remember rucksacks aren't waterproof, so use dry bags inside to keep all your kit dry."

Maps, a waterproof map case and a robust mountain compass are all musts as well.

Beginners can find further health advice in the BMC's free *New Hill Walkers* booklet (at bmc.co.uk). For specific advice on medical hazards when trekking abroad, try Mountain Training's *International Mountain Trekking* handbook (mountain-training.org). Also, see our guide to hiking health on p78 and book a check-up with your GP before you go too.

Case study

KAREN SHAKESPEARE

Aussie-born Karen recently embarked on her first high-altitude mountain trek in Nepal. Here's how she fared...



Why did you decide to trek in Nepal?

I was reaching an age milestone, the large and daunting 60. Unable to decide

where in the world I wanted to celebrate this special occasion, a cheap flight to Kathmandu appeared on the screen and solved the problem.

What training did you do?

With absolutely no experience or training, I decided on attempting Poon Hill on the advice of a charming Nepalese guide who assured me there was only a small degree of difficulty.

What was the biggest challenge you faced?

The first day was a killer: we trekked continuously upward without any relief of an occasional decline. I was breathless and aching. I knew it was not a competition but I felt obliged to keep up with my young friends who were more than half my age. If I'd had the energy I would have kicked myself for taking up the challenge. I was 60, what was I thinking?

Anything else?

The leeches were a constant harassment – we were continually stopping to peel them from our clothes and bodies. And the weather was unfortunately unfavourable; the scenes that I had been promised, and had seen in photos, remained hidden by the inclement clouds. On each of the four mornings, we rose to be greeted with fog.

What was the most important thing you learnt from the trek?

Although I enjoyed Nepal immensely on many levels, I should have been better prepared and should have done a bit of research. ■

TOP TIP

Don't run before you can walk. "Don't sign up for a Grade 3 scramble if you had never been hill-walking before – it would scare the pants off you!"

Rob Johnson,
International Mountain Leader



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Yes, travel insurance is pretty dull. But it's really, *really* important. And while most claims are for nothing more than a lost bag or delayed flight, we live in volatile times. Now, more than ever, you need to check your policy's small print for areas that may not be covered.

We've teamed up with leading provider *Insure & Go* for a policy that goes further. *Insure & Go* covers the basics (from medical care to repatriation) but it's just introduced some new add-ons...

Supplier bankruptcy

In 2011, 24 holiday companies collapsed; in 2010, it was a huge 239. Which just highlights the importance of being insured for such provider failures. *Insure & Go's Supplier Insolvency add-on* (included in Gold, Platinum and Black policies; not available in others) gives cover in the event that travel providers, including suppliers of hotels and car hire, become insolvent.

Also, *Insure & Go's Scheduled Airline Failure Insurance*

(included in all policies) means that you are protected if the scheduled airline you've booked on goes under. Perfect peace of mind in these testing times.

Natural disasters

If the word Eyjafjallajökull sends shivers down your spine, this is the cover for you. *Insure & Go's Travel Disruption add-on* includes any claims directly or indirectly caused by any extraordinary atmospheric, meteorological, seismic or geological phenomenon. That means ash clouds, meteorites, tsunamis, earthquakes and other trip-bothering natural upsets.

Civil unrest

Insure & Go's Travel Disruption policy-extra also covers claims made in the event of civil unrest erupting at your destination. Be it organised protests, riots, arson,

looting, border infringements or armed insurrection (except where civil war has been declared), you can rest assured your travels will be covered.

Camera cover

Got a nice bit of photography kit? *Insure & Go* can offer **extra cover for cameras**, so you feel safe while out taking those shots. You can add-on insurance for kit worth up to £1,000 (£1,000 per body and £1,000 per lens if bought separately) for a small supplement. For example, to cover a one-year-old £700 camera for 30 days can cost from just £35.

5 BEST THINGS ABOUT INSURE & GO COVER

- 1 There's no upper age limit
- 2 All pre-existing medical conditions are considered
- 3 There's a range of specialist options: Single trip, Multi-trip, Ski, Backpacker...
- 4 Policies start from just £7
- 5 *Wanderlust* subscribers get 10% off!



Wanderlust

Band of birds
Watch the starling
'Sort Sol' over
Jutland's beaches



TOP TIP

Avoid flash photography and standing – both will frighten the birds and make them disperse. Instead, bring a mat to sit on, grab your binoculars and enjoy!

Instant Expert

The Black Sun

Black sun: isn't that something to do with the occult?

Er, no, not in this instance. We're talking about nature's Sort Sol (Black Sun) – an impressive avian phenomenon that happens every year, mid-March to mid-April (then again in autumn), in southern Jutland, Denmark. No Germanic neopaganism here!

So what is it then?

It's the rustle of millions of wings, which darken the dimming sky. Or, for any film buffs out there, it's the closest you'll get to a real-life (but less scary) reenactment of Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Just before sunset in spring and autumn, hundreds of thousands of European starlings gather from all corners of the skies to perform an impressive twist-twirl ballet, with the flocks almost entirely eclipsing the sun as it sets. The strange spectacle generally lasts for around 20 minutes.

Sounds rather odd – why do they do it?

These aerial acrobats are actually en route from Norway, Sweden and Finland to their

breeding grounds in France, Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands. According to the RSPB, starlings gather like this, with such regularity, for two reasons. First, safety in numbers: predators such as peregrine falcons find it hard to target one bird amid a spellbinding cloud of thousands. Second, to stay warm and exchange information, such as where the best feeding spots are.

How can I see it?

Like everything in nature, the precise whereabouts of the ritual on any given eve isn't easy to predict. That said, if you're willing to trudge through the sludgy marshes of Tønder with a nature guide, your chances are greatly increased.

It only happens in Denmark then?

No, but it's certainly an impressive place to see it. That said, the UK has its own hotspots: you can see marvellous murmurations (gatherings of starlings) at locations such as the Somerset Levels, Gretna Green and Brighton Pier in autumn and winter (see rspb.org.uk).

■ 5-step guide to...

BEING A MOUNTAIN OR HILL AND MOORLAND LEADER



1 Learn people's names It's the least you can do! And when you need it, calling someone by their name gets their attention.

2 Involve the group Get the group you're leading involved in your decisions and actions. They learn loads and you share a small part of the burden. Plus, saying it out loud can help you clarify your plan.

3 Never hold back your enthusiasm If the hills inspire you then make sure everyone knows it – unashamedly share your particular interests.

4 Allow yourself your own adventures Leading groups is satisfying, but you're not going to push the boundaries of what's possible in this role. Schedule in your own adventures every season.

5 Never think you're infallible Be cautious, be your own worst critic and have good coping strategies for when it all starts to go wrong so you've time to go back to the drawing board and revise your plan.

By John Cousins, mountain guide, mountaineering instructor and CEO of Mountain Training UK (www.mountain-training.org). Registration for the Mountain Leader and Hill & Moorland Leader schemes is £39. You must be 18 and have a year's experience.

ASK THE EXPERTS

How to travel solo in South-East Asia; the best sleeper trains; cruises for disabled travellers; what to do if you forget your passport – our experts answer your travel queries...

THE EXPERTS



DAVID SURLY

Head of Business Development,
cambridgeairport.com



KATE ANDREWS

Co-founder, European rail-booking
specialist Loco2.com



ADAM COULTER

UK editor of Cruise Critic,
cruisecritic.co.uk



GEMMA THOMPSON

Editor of *A Girl's Guide to Travelling Alone* (www.facebook.com/AGirlsGuideToTravellingAlone)

Q I'm planning a solo trip to South-East Asia. Is it safe for a lone woman to travel by public transport?

S Ablett, by email

A South-East Asia is a very safe region for solo female travel. Not only is public transport generally economical, (buying your ticket from the station of departure usually means you pay a fixed price), chances are, your bus or train will have other travellers on board too.

Overnight sleeper trains are a rite of passage; book a 'soft sleeper'. Just be prepared to have to get off, then back on again, in the early hours at border crossings.

Taxis, tuk-tuks and cyclos are fun but require some negotiating skills. Some (especially in larger cities) may try to make a stop at a friend's shop en route. Be firm and don't do it, though accept that some drivers may charge more for a 'direct trip' – agree the price before you set off. Trains and buses can run late, so if you're alone, plan to arrive at your destination earlier in the day.

Gemma Thompson

Q I'm about to move overseas for a six-month stint – how can I settle into a new country?

H Comfort, by email

A Rent an apartment. You can rent houses and apartments, away from the tourist centre, from a variety of websites. This way, you get twice the room at half the price of

hotels, can cook your meals at home, and have the opportunity to live like locals, not tourists. The neighbours and tradespeople will begin to recognise you, and before long you're accepted as part of the community.

Also, in most large cities there are gatherings for ex-pats and locals that offer an opportunity to make friends. Talk to people everywhere you go. Many times friendships spring from chats on ferries, buses or in restaurants – lasting friendships come from people you meet casually.

If you don't have time to learn the language, at least memorise key phrases. Learn the important ones – 'please', 'thank you', 'I'm sorry, but I don't speak French/Turkish/Portuguese/etc' – and people will usually try to help you get along! A smile and a friendly attitude are always understood.

Lynne Martin, author of *Home Sweet Anywhere*

Q Is a cruise a good option for a disabled traveller?

Jason King, by email

A A cruise can be ideal. It's certainly possible to take an adventurous or expedition cruise, and enjoy many of the excursions, if you pick your cruise line and trip carefully.

A typical adventure or expedition cruise on one of the smaller ships isn't advisable, as the ship design and itineraries don't tend to be tailored towards disabled

passengers. The logistics of getting on/off the ship and into a Zodiac, coupled with factors in smaller ports – lack of pavements, few taxis etc – can mean accessibility for disabled passengers isn't great.

When choosing a ship, the newer and larger ships are generally better, as these are equipped for disabled passengers, both onboard and in terms of how the activities are facilitated. However, don't discount older ships, as cruise lines often improve accessibility when the vessels undergo refurbishment.

For a more adventurous itinerary, consider lines such as Oceania, Celebrity, Princess and Holland America Line, all of which offer cruises to destinations including Alaska and Antarctica and have ships that are well equipped for disabled passengers.

Adam Coulter, cruisecritic.co.uk



Accessible Antarctica
Larger vessels tend to be better equipped for disabled cruisers

Insiders' Guide to... WALKING TRIPS



Chloe Knott, senior product manager at Exodus Travels (exodus.co.uk), reveals why walking trips should be at the top of your list for 2015

WHY WALK: It has been proven that walking not only makes you healthier but happier too. Combine this with meeting new people, and being amid inspirational landscapes only accessible on foot, and you have the perfect recipe for a great holiday. Switch off your phone, enjoy a 'tech detox' on the trails, get fitter and enjoy the sun's rays. What's not to love?

WHERE'S HOT: With the 2016 Olympics just round the corner, the host nation Brazil is attracting a lot of interest. It is the largest country in South America and there is a lot to discover, including some of the finest trekking in the world. For example, the north-east is home to mountainous terrain, waterfalls, canyons and grottoes, all just waiting to be explored.

TOP PACKING TIP: If you're heading somewhere where the nights will be a bit chilly, take a metal Sigg bottle. By day, use it to carry drinking water; at night, fill it with hot water, cover it with a sock and use it as a hotwater bottle: the perfect way to keep toasty and warm!

TOP TREK: Everest Base Camp. The Himalaya are simply awe-inspiring, and the mixture of challenging walking, dramatic scenery and sense of achievement on reaching Base Camp makes this hard to beat.

 **exodus**
www.exodus.co.uk

'Although many sleepers have been cut from timetables during the past few years, there are still some amazing night trains in Europe'

Q If I arrive at the airport without my passport, is there anything I can do?

Jim, by email

A I hate to say it, but in most cases, no. On most domestic flights in the UK, and also on flights to Ireland, you can generally travel with an official photo ID such as your driving licence; there are a few airlines that don't allow this, but actually the regulatory authorities permit it. However, on international flights you will always need your passport;

unless you can get someone to rush it to you, you're a bit stuck.

Get into the habit of making a passport check the last thing you do before leaving home for the airport. Also, check it's *your* passport and not your other half's (that happens a lot). Keep it safe when you travel – just be sure not to leave it in your hotel's safe.

I know of a passenger on a long-haul flight who managed to drop his passport on the air-bridge to the aircraft; it slid down between the jetty and the side of the aircraft at the doorway and dropped onto

the wing. The crew had to enlist the services of cherry-pickers and ground personnel to clamber onto the aircraft and retrieve it before they could take-off, as the passenger would not have been able to travel without it.

David Surley, airline expert

Q I hear sleeper trains are being phased out in Europe – are there any good ones I can still take?

Pete Browning, by email

A Although many high-profile sleeper trains have been cut from timetables during the past few years – notably Paris-Barcelona, Paris-Rome and Paris-Berlin – there are still some amazing night trains in Europe.

The Caledonian Sleeper from London to the Scottish Highlands is undergoing a major refurbishment

to turn the experience into 'Scotland on wheels' by 2018. But even now it is a great sleeper train. Go London-Fort William, and leave the chaos of England's capital behind before waking up in the majesty of the Scottish Highlands.

Or take the night train to Siracusa in Sicily, which departs every evening from Rome. From the moment you're on Sicilian shores, you'll be fixated by the rocky Mediterranean coastline to the east and Mount Etna to the west.

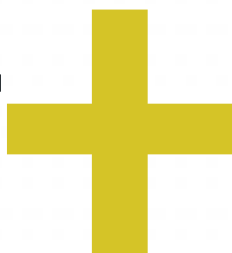
The weekly night train from Nice to Moscow is an epic 50-hour adventure. The train departs Nice on Saturday evenings, arriving late on Monday. Just make sure you've got a Belarus transit visa before boarding or you could fall foul of the Belarussian border police!

Kate Andrews, rail-booking specialist Loco2.com 



TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



Your guide to hiking health

There's nothing quite like hiking for exploring the remotest parts of the planet. But what about the parts of your body?

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth looks at how to keep your whole self healthy when you hit the trails



1 HEAD

Hikers often get headaches. This may be due to dehydration – exercise is inherently dehydrating, and more fluid is lost at altitude through breathing, and through skin at high temperatures and in windy conditions. High-altitude headache is common in the unacclimatised above 3,000m; consider taking acetazolamide. Some generalised illnesses (eg Lyme disease, sleeping sickness) may start with headache.

2 FACE & NOSE

The face, ear-tops and back of the neck are most prone to sunburn and skin cancer; apply sunscreen and SPF lip balm frequently. Nosebleeds are common, and can be torrential, in the high, cold deserts. Anoint the inside of the nose with Vaseline to prevent nosebleeds (or to reduce the chance of a re-bleed). Treat bleeds by pinching the nose to hold in the blood and then allow the clot to form.

3 TORSO

Research the right specialist clothing for the conditions in which you'll be hiking. Avoid hypothermia and exposure by wearing layers. Pack for adaptability, and for the worst possible conditions. Avoid heavy, slow-drying cotton T-shirts; choose light, high-wicking fabrics; pack a spare pair of gloves.

4 BOTTOM

Piles or haemorrhoids are common in backpackers – travellers' diarrhoea as well as constipation can cause them, and poor core strength contributes. Not drinking enough water leads to constipation and thus piles, so make sure you stay well-hydrated while hiking. Hike with a minimum of luggage as anything that raises intra-abdominal pressure also predisposes you to piles.

TOP TIP

Lifting unwieldy luggage predisposes to back troubles. Get any ongoing problems sorted by a physiotherapist. Consider doing core strengthening exercises or a course of Pilates.

5 MUSCLES

Hikers can be on their feet all day, for many days in a row – your muscles are going to get quite a workout. Consider doing some stretches at the end of each day paying special attention to quads and glutes. Get a friend to give you a massage or travel with do-it-yourself massage rollers or balls. Hot showers or a soak in a bath or hot spring are great, though not possible everywhere.

6 GENITALS

Tropical trekkers are most likely to experience crotch itch. Wear loose cotton undies and carry antifungal cream and powder. Ticks like to feed on people who are walking through forest and scrub, and on those who camp – check for ticks each evening by running your hands over your skin, especially pubes and armpits, even if you do not shower. Know how to remove a tick safely.

7 LEGS

Consider what might scratch, bite or sting you on your trek. You may want to wear gaiters to protect your lower legs. Trousers worn tucked in, but with some air between the leg and the garment, protect from snakebite, hairy caterpillars and thorns. Clothes can be proofed against small biters with EX-4 repellent. Avoid jeans, which are heavy, are even heavier when wet and dry slowly.

8 KNEES

Knee injuries are common, with descents being especially challenging – those with weak quadriceps default to stepping down onto a straight leg; pain and swelling follow. Try daily sets of step-ups on a dining chair before you go: 50 times leading with one leg then 50 with the other; if you can't manage 100 without a rest you are not fit enough. Consider using walking poles or an ice axe.

9 ANKLES

To help prevent against ankle sprains, wear sturdy boots (rather than shoes) for increased support. Pre-trip preparation can help avoid foot problems: practise standing on one leg, eyes closed, for 30 seconds; this protects from injuries sustained from landing awkwardly by tuning up proprioceptive nerve pathways.

10 FEET

Be sure to break in your boots, and wear good specialist socks – consider double socks. Also consider pre-soaking your feet in surgical spirit a week or so in advance to harden the skin (though not for too long as very hard, thick skin can fissure). Watch out for athlete's foot – discomfort between the toes is an early sign. Apply Lamisil (antifungal cream) and consider packing antifungal power.

ESSENTIALS TO PACK

- ◆ Lamisil/terbinafine antifungal cream and Mycota antifungal power – for between the toes and the crotch
- ◆ Sticking plasters and blister dressings
- ◆ A good drying antiseptic – I like potassium permanganate crystals
- ◆ Crepe bandage (which is more adaptable than a joint support); to keep its stretch, it needs squeezing through with soap and water on occasion
- ◆ A good sealable one-litre waterbottle and water purification tabs (if appropriate)
- ◆ Sunscreen, lip protection and skin moisturisers (especially in high, cold deserts)
- ◆ Light-coloured clothes – they are cooler; also, insects including mosquitoes know they can't be seen against dark backgrounds



Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth loves the mountains and has trekked hundreds of miles in Nepal. Her website is www.wilson-howarth.com.

Getty

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Wanderlust **GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015**

Want to know the best kit to take on your travels? Check out the winners of our inaugural Gear of the Year Awards and your packing will be literally in the bag...

JUDGING

In December 2014, gear manufacturers were asked to submit one piece of kit per category. An expert panel of judges scored each item on its merits for active travellers, taking into account versatility, weight, features and durability. The judges were: Alan Hinkes OBE, the only Brit to have climbed the world's 14 highest mountains over 8,000m; Paul Goodyer, founder and CEO of Nomad Travel Stores; and Phoebe Smith, *Wanderlust* editor.

Wanderlust GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015



**BEST
LUGGAGE**



**BEST
INSULATED
JACKET**

1 OSPREY, Ozone 70 Convertible, £180 Judges' comments: "Boasting three different carry options, a removable daypack and a light unpacked weight, this is a versatile piece of luggage at a good price."

Runner up: Arc'teryx Carrier Duffel 100L; Third: Aquapac Upango Duffel 40L

2 BERGHAUS, HyperTherm, £120 Judges' comments: "A lightweight, nifty two-in-one reversible jacket that gives travellers adaptable insulation for different conditions." *Runner up: Arc'teryx Atom LT Hoody; Third: Yeti North Jacket*

3 KEEN, Durand Mid WP, £140 & 4 RIDGEMONT, Mesa Shoe, £89 Judges' comments: On Keen: "Comfy straight from the box. From trails to city streets and jumping on and off trains and planes, this is good all-round footwear to travel with." On Ridgmont: "Proving that there's sometimes more than meets the eye, these shoes wouldn't look out of place in towns but hide the special features made for walking on trails too – genius."

Runner up: Hanwag Alta Bunion Boots



**BEST
FOOTWEAR**





**BEST
DAY
PACK**

5



**BEST
TRAVEL
TOP**

6



8

**BEST
WATERPROOF
JACKET**



7

**BEST
TRAVEL
TROUSERS**

5 LOWE ALPINE, AirZone Quest 27, £90 Judges' comments: "A great rucksack, packed with all the features a traveller should need, whether hiking in the hills or strolling in the city." *Runner up: Lifeventure Dakar 35; Third: Osprey Talon 33*

6 CRAGHOPPERS, Nosilife Darla Long-Sleeved Shirt, £50 Judges' comments: "A fantastic level of sun protection, lifelong insect repellency and extra features make this shirt a clear winner."

Runner up: Royal Robbins Expedition Shirt; Third: Rohan Sanctuary Shirt

7 ROHAN, Rohan Jeans Plus, £75 Judges' comments: "Boasting well-hidden security pockets, a fairly quick-drying material and the look of normal jeans, these allow the traveller to journey in comfort with all the extras you'd want from a trouser." *Runner up: Craghoppers Nosilife Cargo Trousers; Joint third: Royal Robbins Backcountry Pants, Páramo Men's Maui II Trousers*

8 SHERPA, Lakpa Rita, £280 & 9 PÁRAMO, Andina Jacket, £240 Judges' comments: On Sherpa: "Made from great waterproof and breathable fabric, with a good fit, light weight, excellent hood and feel-good backstory, this is a jacket you would be proud to take on all your travels." On Páramo: "Unique fabric technology makes a weatherproof jacket that's soft, very packable, boasts a whole range of useful features and has a well-designed fit. *Runner up: Arc'teryx Beta AR Jacket*



9



In-speared views
A tribal warrior looks
out across the eastern
scarp of Kenya's Great
Rift Valley



ROAMING THE RIFT

A new trail across Kenya's Great Rift Valley links mud-and-thatch villages, shimmering lakes, flocks of flamingos, wildlife galore and around 25 million years of geological history

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **BEN LERWILL**

‘The week began with me looking down onto a pink-hued panorama. It was October, and somewhere in the region of 700,000 flamingos were resident on Lake Bogoria’

Two marabou storks came wheeling overhead, wings like black sails; my eyes followed them until they became dots in the landscape. Mankind began

here. That's the theory. Among the cactus-studded plains and steaming lakes of Kenya's Great Rift Valley, it's said that our forebears first graduated from four legs to two. Hominid skeletons have been found here dating back some six million years, which is a stirring thought to have in mind when you stare out across the valley's broad rumple of hills and feel the hot equatorial breeze on your skin. The human race picked a pretty special place to start out.

I'd been finding out that it was a special place to walk, too. For the past week I'd been travelling by foot across the valley under gaping skies of blue, clocking up the kilometres by day and camping on riverbanks and hilltops at night. This was not the Kenya of high-end savannah lodges and lion sightings, nor was it the Kenya of

beach resorts and dhow boats. The bushland was punctuated by corrugated iron churches and mud-and-thatch villages. "Little number of tourists here," smiled my unflappable local accomplice Jackson one morning, after we'd exchanged long handshakes with a goatherd. "Everyone is happy to see us."

I'd come to western Kenya – around six hours' drive from Nairobi – to hike the Trans-Rift Trail, a new community-focused project aimed at drawing more visitors to this sweepingly scenic but often overlooked part of the country. The idea behind the initiative is a simple one: the walking trail passes from one side of the Great Rift Valley to the other. Stitching together old grazing routes and trading paths, it follows a 140km route between the valley's eastern and western escarpments, tracing a cross-section across the basin floor itself, from ridge to ridge. It makes use of local hiking guides, local food and local campsites.

"I see it like a walk back in time," explained William Kimosop, the trail's founder and chief game warden of the region. He had a wide grin that made him instantly likeable. "This part of the valley is often called the cradle of ►







◀ mankind, but it was also a magnet for a lot of the great 19th-century explorers, the early pioneers – people like Joseph Thomson, James Hannington and Count Samuel Teleki. They all came here. So you'll be following in their footsteps too."

Africa's best

Formed between 30 and eight million years ago as the planet did its best to rip Africa in two, the Great Rift Valley is an immense fissure stretching 6,000km along the length of the continent, from the Middle East in the north to Mozambique in the south. The feature's now-familiar name was coined by another Victorian-era traveller, British geologist John Walter Gregory, who came to Kenya twice and was astounded by the sheer size of the trench. He declared it 'the most beautiful view in Africa'.

The valley's shape also means it forms a natural migration corridor for birdlife,

so it was fitting that the week began with me looking down onto a pink-hued panorama. It was October, and somewhere in the region of 700,000 flamingos were resident on Lake Bogoria.

I was standing on the rim of the eastern escarpment, above the lake's silvery alkaline waters. Vast twig-thin flocks of flamingos were clustered in dense numbers around the shoreline, feeding on the blue-green algae that, illogically, gives the birds their rosy tint. As I watched, several hundred of them took flight – ungainly on take-off, then hard and fast when airborne – to a more distant part of the lake. Hot springs and geysers frothed and bubbled along the waterside. Pelicans looked on from high branches. The whole scene had a grand, cinematic quality; I was left marvelling, not for the last time, that there was no one else around – no white jeeps, no frantically snapping tour groups – to savour the view.

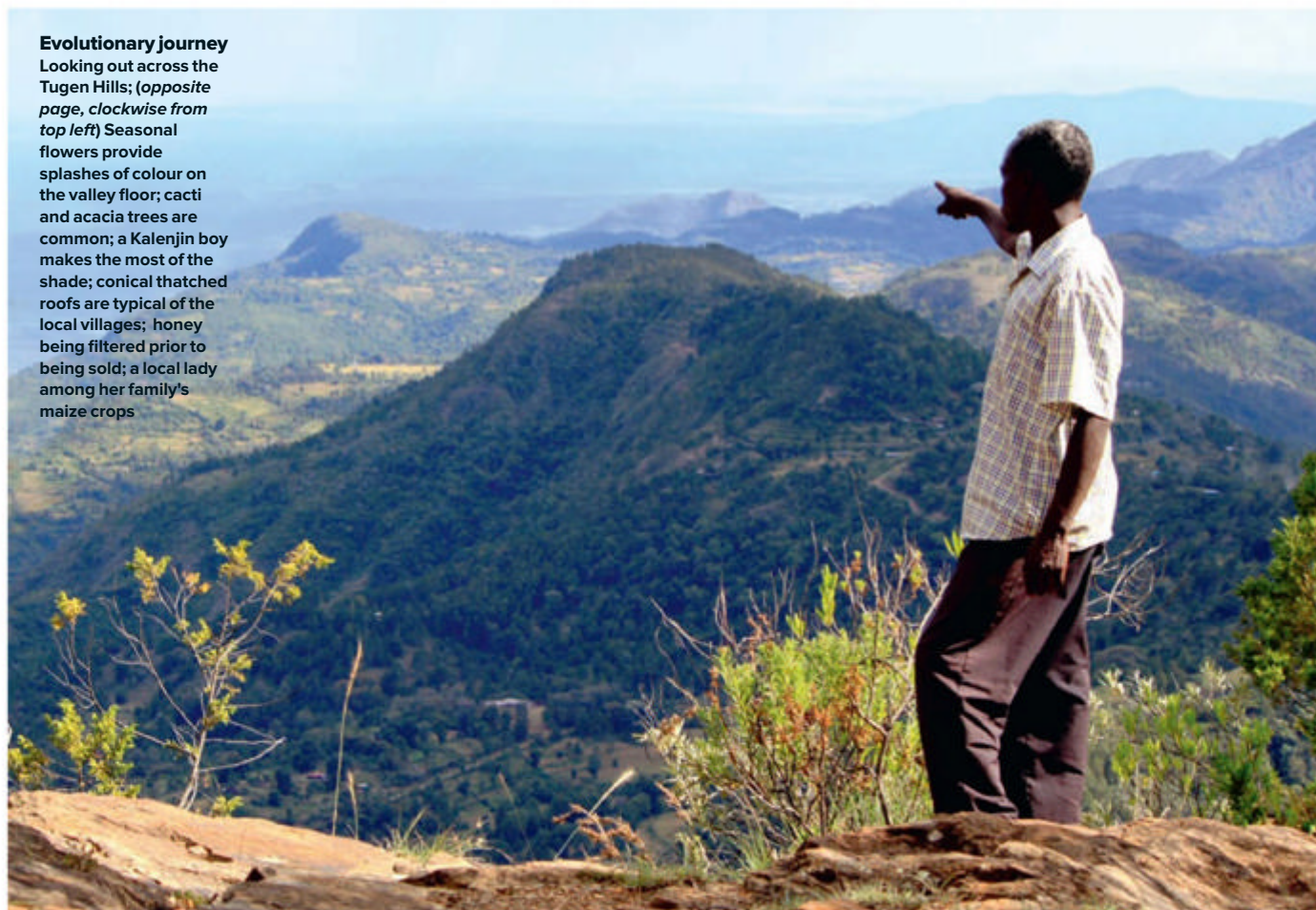
On that first morning, I felt a little humbled. I'd emerged from my tent with a backpack, sun hat, water bottle and the usual hiking paraphernalia. I was then introduced to Jackson, clad in a smart V-neck sweater and unburdened with such indulgent fripperies as water or even a bag. We were about to embark on a six-hour walk in 30°C-plus heat. He looked like a man about to pop out for a newspaper. He was in his late 50s, and had elongated earlobes that had once held heavy tribal jewellery. "I am like a camel," he laughed. "I don't need water."

But Jackson was to prove himself the perfect hiking companion, owl-wise and tireless. As the trail wore on and the two of us were joined each day by guides local to the particular communities we were passing through, he kept spirits high and bearings accurate. When need demanded it, he even started carrying ►

'Hot springs and geysers frothed and bubbled along the waterside. Pelicans looked on from high branches. The whole scene had a grand, cinematic quality'

Evolutionary journey

Looking out across the Tugen Hills; (opposite page, clockwise from top left) Seasonal flowers provide splashes of colour on the valley floor; cacti and acacia trees are common; a Kalenjin boy makes the most of the shade; conical thatched roofs are typical of the local villages; honey being filtered prior to being sold; a local lady among her family's maize crops



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◀ a rucksack. I was crossing the Great Rift Valley in his company – open African countryside and starry nights lay ahead. The week would be memorable.

Part of the tribe

It was the third day of walking. There had been a brief rain shower, and the red earth smelt raw and vegetal. Birdsong swirled around us in fluting choruses. In the distance, tendrils of smoke from far-off charcoal kilns curled above the woods. And for perhaps the fifth time that morning, we encountered a local pastoralist ushering stoic, water-laden donkeys through the bush. A look of surprise, a smile. “Chamgei!” came the greeting.

I had packed a Swahili phrasebook for the trip, but should really have known better. Swahili may be one of the country’s two official languages (alongside English), but this was Kalenjin country, with its

own entirely separate dialect. The bush villages we walked through held basic but well-tended homesteads, almost always lacking electricity but flanked by plots of maize and busy with plump livestock. Conical straw roofs marked out family dwellings. The locals we met were open and inquisitive, ready to laugh.

Tribal affiliation is of enormous importance in Kenya, with most people identifying themselves by their tribe first and their nationality second. Many of the country’s well-documented political controversies have their roots in precisely this trait. The area of the Rift Valley that we were travelling through is a long-established homeland for the Kalenjin people, known traditionally as farmers. “And we are runners too,” Jackson told me. “Long-distance runners.”

Big-name international athletes such as five-time world champion Paul Tergat and

Dennis Kimetto, who smashed the world marathon record in September 2014, are a source of genuine pride here; several times we were passed by fleet-footed locals – children en route to school, women on their way to the village waterhole, one striding, Nike-clad runner who clearly had aspirations further afield.

It’s said that the valley’s high altitude and up-and-down terrain provide perfect breeding for athletes. Mo Farah has trained nearby. “And the diet is important,” one of the community guides, Chris, explained to me. “The runners eat *ugali* [maize-meal porridge] and drink *mursik* [fermented cows’ milk]. It makes them strong.” Mursik, I can report, is thick, lumpy and off-white – and best described as an acquired taste.

Chris also casually informed me that he possessed 400 goats, and the animals were certainly plentiful as we made our way across the valley, not just in the bush but ►



Rise and sunshine
Tucking into a breakfast while overlooking the valley from the eastern escarpment



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Land of bubbles and honey
Locals at Maji Moto enjoy the hot springs; (below) a community cooperative manages the honey production

famously had to cut short her holiday to Kenya when her father died. One of the spots she was due to visit was a campsite high in the hills, now known as the Royal Camp. When we arrived there mid-afternoon, a group of 80 local girls on a school trip were stood singing gospel songs. Their voices spilled up into the sky. At first light the next morning, meanwhile, Mount Kenya, Africa's second-highest mountain, stood noble on an orange horizon. A site fit for royalty? No question.

The week continued to produce surprises. I knew that the Big Five didn't frequent this part of the Rift Valley, so hadn't expected much wildlife. I was wrong. "Look, zebra," said Jackson one morning – I followed his finger and saw four nearby in the bush. More animals were to follow. We saw tortoises, mongooses and monkeys. Pairs of dainty dik-diks sprang up rocks. Baboons lumbered across the trail. Gentle impala drifted away from us. The birdlife was remarkable too: yellow-billed hornbills, lilac-breasted rollers, green wood hoopoes and my personal favourite, the white-bellied go-away bird.

At times, the heat was an issue. Midday in the tropics is not always a great friend to hikers. But it's worth noting that walkers aren't obliged to cover the entire distance – half-day treks and 4WD pick-ups are easily arranged if desired. Indeed, when Jackson and I reached the main tarmac road that stretches up the Rift Valley from Nairobi to South Sudan, we opted for a vehicle transfer rather than an hour of roadside hiking. "The trail can be as hard as people want it to be," William had told me. "Crossing the valley is the important thing."

When we clambered and clawed our way up the valley's 3,000m-high western escarpment to finish the trek, I felt the sense of achievement that comes from completing a long, hard yomp. As much as the landscapes had been magnificent, however, the people I met along the way will linger in the memory for just as long: the softly spoken man who had turned production of the local honey, garnered from basic log hives, into a community cooperative; the beaming woman who rushed chai tea and chapatti flatbreads out to us in the lunchtime shade; the 70-year-old who had been walking this same trail all his life, and had four wives and 25 kids to show for it.

Hotel beds and hot showers awaited us on the final night. Breakfast the following morning was on the balcony, looking back across the cloud-patched valley, back across the cradle of mankind. "The Kalenjin language has no word for goodbye," Jackson had told me earlier in the week. "Only thank you". It seemed apt, somehow. ■

◀ on the dinner plate. Local tour operator East African Eco Adventures was keeping us fed and sheltered, shuttling our tents and provisions from one campsite to the next and creating disarmingly good evening meals from regional ingredients. I'd previously had no inkling that charcoal-roasted goat could be so tender, nor that river-caught catfish was quite so moreish. Such were the joys of walking up an appetite.

Our campsites varied greatly – on one night we slept under the stars, bedding down on top of an old Land Rover – and the landscapes were just as diverse. On the scorching valley floor we walked among thorny scrub and flat-topped acacia, while in the highlands we wandered through cool pine groves, treading a path between tomato and coffee plantations. Flowers shone from the undergrowth. Huge views tumbled out and down, full of green slopes, farming terraces and rippling rock formations. It struck me that some things would have changed little since explorers such as Hannington and Thomson were here more than 130 years ago.

The walk held magical moments. On the evening that we reached the village of Maji Moto, a luxury was revealed in the form of a natural thermal rock pool. We tore off walking clothes and sank into

the deep, warm waters just as fireflies were emerging from the trees. In the Great Rift Valley, the days of hiking are long, sometimes shatteringly so, but they're more than worthwhile.

Royal approval

Somewhere in the folds of the Tugen Hills, the belt of peaks that runs down the middle of the valley, there lives a young boy named Tonyblair Jepkurui. His mother Ester had joined us for our penultimate day's hiking. "No, we don't admire the man," she told me patiently, resplendent in an emerald-green Kenya football shirt. "We just admire the name, from the news. We wanted a name that was different."

The former PM isn't the only Brit to have made an impression of sorts here. In 1955, the Queen – then Princess Elizabeth –





Kenya Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Nairobi
Population: 45 million
Language: Swahili and English (official), plus many other dialects
Time: GMT+3
International dialling code: +254
Visas: Required by UK nationals. You can buy a visa on arrival at the airport (£30/US\$50 cash).
Money: Kenyan shilling (KES), currently around KES140 to the UK£. There are ATMs at the airport.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ Good time for wildlife; workable time of year for hiking the Rift Valley, although peak temperatures can be very high, particularly January-February.
 ■ Unpredictable weather – rain can be an issue.
 ■ The most pleasant time to hike the Rift Valley. Flamingos have usually taken up residence at Lake Bogoria.

Health & safety
 Malaria tablets are recommended and standard travel vaccinations should be up to date.
 The FCO currently advises against travel to areas close to the Kenya-Somali border – but this is well away from the Rift Valley.

Further reading & information
Kenya (Rough Guides, 2013), recently updated by an experienced author Richard Trillo
Africa's Great Rift Valley (Abrams, 2001) by Nigel Pavitt tells the story of the valley's evolution, tribal life, exploration and discovery
magicalkenya.com – Kenya Tourism Board

More online
 Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/154 for links to more content:
ARCHIVE ARTICLES
 ♦ Great Migration calendar: 12 months, 12 ways – issue 119
 ♦ Tribal gatherings: Lake Turkana Festival, Kenya – issue 139
 ♦ Preserving Kenya's Masai Mara – issue 149
PLANNING GUIDES
 ♦ Kenya travel guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled with **East African Eco Adventures** (+254 (0) 715 500 540, eaea.co.ke). The eight-day itinerary included transfers, 4WD support, full-board accommodation (including drinking water and all meals on trek), park fees, camping equipment and local guides.

A similar itinerary would cost approximately £1,175pp, based on a group of two people, or £725pp, based on a group of four. International flights not included.

Getting there
Kenya Airways (020 8283 1818, kenya-airways.com) operates daily overnight flights from London Heathrow to Nairobi from £732 return. **British Airways** (0844 493 0787, ba.com) also flies direct; many other carriers offer one-stop services. Flight time from London is approximately 8.5 hours.

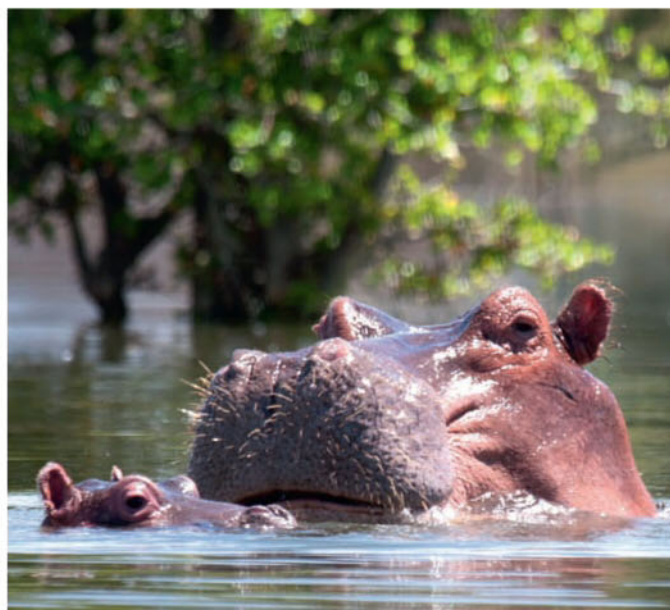
Getting around
 Transfer time from Nairobi to the trailhead above Lake Bogoria is approximately six hours. The nearest large city is **Nakuru**, from where transport by taxi or *matatu* (privately run minibuses) can be arranged if needed.

Cost of travel
 This part of Kenya draws relatively few foreign tourists, so tends to be **inexpensive**. Meals cost from £2-3; accommodation starts cheap too. Tipping is always welcomed (tipping hiking guides with old camping or walking equipment will be particularly appreciated).

Accommodation
 For those looking to extend their stay in the Rift Valley region, accommodation ranges from basic rooms (approx £5 upwards) to smart resorts such as the recently opened **Samich Resort** (doubles from £75; resortsamich.co.ke).

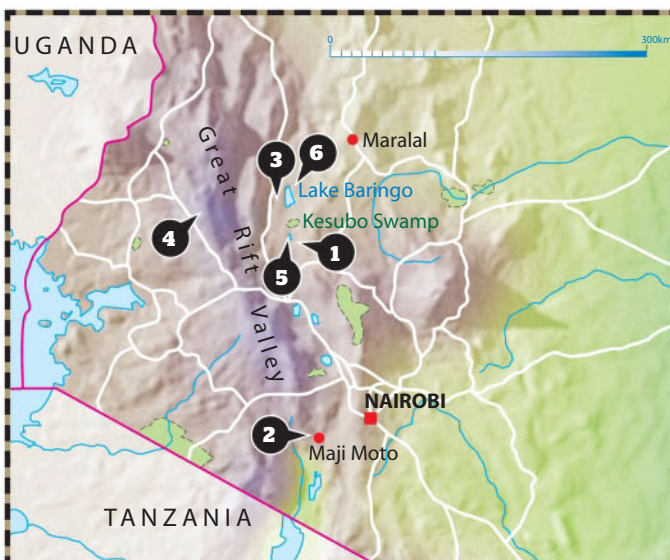
Food & drink
 Popular local foods include goat, beef, **ugali** (maize-meal porridge) and fresh vegetables.
 The most popular local beers are Tusker and the slightly stronger (and tastier) Tusker Malt.

What to pack
 If hiking the Trans-Rift Trail, you're advised to bring a light raincoat, **water flask**, backpack, sunhat, **sunblock**, binoculars, first aid kit, trekking clothes/shoes, head torch, sleeping bag and towel.



RIFT VALLEY HIGHLIGHTS

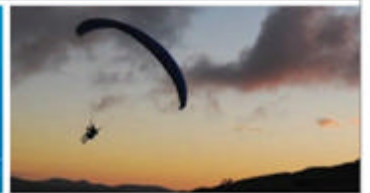
- Lake Bogoria**
A beautiful, flamingo-frequented lake beneath the eastern escarpment, measuring 34km long and around 3.5km. Its water level has risen in recent years.
- Maji Moto**
A welcoming Kalenjin village an hour's walk from Lake Bogoria. It has a campsite with *bandas* (traditional huts), and offers the chance to bathe in natural hot springs.
- Royal Camp**
Spectacular campsite among cedar trees in the Tugen Hills, with great views to both the east and west. It's where the Queen would have stayed if she hadn't been called back to the UK in 1955.
- Keiyo Escarpment**
The trail culminates at the 3,000m-high village of Chororget on the western escarpment, which stands above a spread of green. Temperatures are considerably cooler than on the valley floor.
- Kesubo Swamp**
Sitting just north of Lake Bogoria, this is a haven for East African birdlife. Records show that 96 different species were once spotted here in one hour.
- Lake Baringo**
Bogoria's neighbour is a large freshwater lake that's a great place to spot hippos (pictured), as well as being another top spot for birds.



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Bathing in the light
Sunrise stretches
across the bog
around Connemara's
Twelve Bens



CONNEMARA CRAIC

Head to Connemara – in Ireland's wild west – for white-sand beaches, rugged shores, islands, intrigue, whales, white horses and the warmest local welcome

WORDS **LYN HUGHES** PHOTOGRAPHS **PAUL HARRIS**



Beside the seaside...

(clockwise from this)

A handful of walkers take to the coastline at Gurteen beach; the Ballinasloe October Fair is one of the oldest fairs in Ireland; local oysters and Guinness make for a rich dinner; the sign at Gurteen beach; local fisherman; walking up Cashel Hill near Roundstone; a traditional narrow field on the Renvyle peninsula; (centre) rainbow over Connemara

T

he sea shimmered bright blue, and white-sand beaches stretched away to either side of the rocks on which I stood. This sand was formed by shells and tiny sea creatures, rather than by the local limestone, and dazzled white in the autumnal sunshine, with just the occasional dog walker sauntering by. Someone had told me they'd proposed to their partner here. I could see why. A magical spot.

But, despite the idyllic scene, I kept looking back over my shoulder at the

caravan park behind and the sign that announced 'Gurteen Bay'. I was in the district of Connemara; I own a Connemara-breed horse whose name is Gurteen Mystic – it crossed my mind that he could have been born here.

Following an impulse, I went to the holiday park and knocked at the door. "This might sound strange," I said to the lady busy vacuuming, "but I own a horse and I was wondering whether he came from here."

She was unfazed by my query. "You'll need my husband," she replied, "but he is in America at the moment. Go round to our pony barn, our son may be able to help."

Round at the barn, where two foals were stabled, Brian Mullen was delighted when I asked him the same question. Yes, of course my horse was born here; Mystic's mother died a few years ago but they still breed from her daughters. "It's a bit of a hobby; an expensive hobby," Brian grinned. He showed me one of the cute foals, explaining that she was my horse's niece on both sides of her breeding.

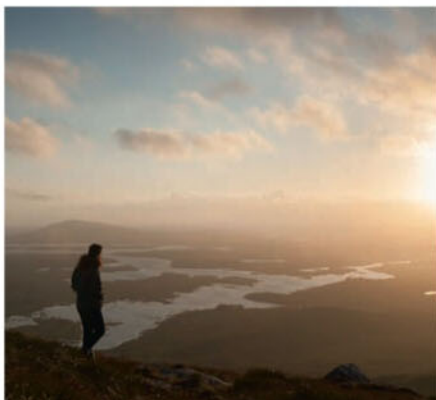
"It's such a shame you missed my Dad! When are you coming back?" asked Brian.

"Come back next year and we'll take you to see all the horses!"

The Connemara ponies are renowned worldwide for their hardiness, intelligence and adaptability. They are nearly always grey (white) in colour and are a common sight in the small dry-walled fields of this rugged corner of West Ireland. Look on a map and you will see speckles of water covering the land. In reality, when you're on the ground it is the white specks of ponies, cottages and bungalows, that you notice – along with the ever-changing light. It's an elemental land of peat bogs and heath, loughs and rivers, mountains and rocks. And the ocean, always the ocean.

The region known as Connemara has the Atlantic on three sides, and this ragged coast is part of the Wild Atlantic Way – the romantic yet fitting name given to the 2,500km driving route up the west coast of Ireland. It's been a marketing masterstroke, putting the west on the travel radar; many small businesses are benefiting from it.

The good weather of summer and autumn 2014 helped too. A ferocious storm was blowing when I flew in but the sun was ►





**Hooves, hikes
and a *Hussy***
(clockwise from this)
Walking on Cashel Hill;
a typical Connemara
pony; cemetery on
Renvyle peninsula; the
Brazen Hussy heads out



◀ shining a couple of days later when I headed out on the ocean aboard a catamaran owned by Shane Bisgood. The wonderfully named *Brazen Hussy* can be hired as an alternative to the ferries that ply the off-shore islands, or for angling, scuba diving or wildlife-watching trips.

"If you'd been here a few weeks ago we'd have seen thousands of sea birds, including puffins," said Shane as he took the *Brazen Hussy* close to some guano-stained cliffs. "We see basking sharks and lots of whales – mostly minke but blue whales and fin whales too when we're lucky."

We had already spotted a pod of dolphins and a minke whale so anything else was a bonus. We passed the derelict houses on Inishark Island – abandoned in 1960 when the government evacuated the last residents – before heading on to Inishbofin and the

'The Wild Atlantic Way might be a driving route, but you need to ditch the car to really appreciate Connemara's wild beauty'

brooding black castle standing sentinel at its harbour. This 16th-century fort, known today as Cromwell's Barracks, acted both as a defence against pirates and as a prison for Catholic priests during the Cromwellian period. Indeed, Inishbofin has had a colourful history out of all proportion to its size, including being a pirate stronghold.

Despite its small population (just 165 full-time residents), the island is now known

as an important centre for arts and music, both traditional and contemporary. But the other reason people come here is for the peace, quiet and nature.

We had crab claws and a fortifying pint in a pub. Then, after a bit of a mosey around the island, we set off back to the mainland. The breeze had picked up, and the sea was choppy, but every now and then a whale spout would spurt above the white water. ►

Anchors Aweigh
A fishing boat's anchor rope awaits use on the
Aughrus Peninsula





**Huge rocks,
rolling hills**
Walking in the
Maumturk Mountains
near Kylemore Abbey;
(right page) cold
waters, fresh food,
bright-eyed horses and
tidal treks are all parts
of the Connemara
experience



'The grand finale was a late-afternoon horse ride to Omey Island. Under overcast skies we galloped across the sand'

◀ The next day, in Killary Fjord – which some consider to be the northern boundary of the Connemara region – the sea was like a mill pond and the annual Great Fjord Swim was being held. “You can get changed over there,” said a helpful steward when I dropped by to take a look. Although the sun was out, it was October and I couldn’t imagine the water would be too warm. However, plenty of people were braver than me: 450 souls ploughing through the crystal-clear water.

Further up the fjord were mussel farms, while otters could be seen gliding through the water and scampering along the shore. Every pub and restaurant seemed to offer the local specialities, with Killary mussels, seafood chowder and local crab on most menus. At the lovely Lough Inagh Lodge Hotel the special of the day was prawns from the fjord, caught just hours earlier. “They’re the best I have ever eaten in my life!” exclaimed a lady at a neighbouring table.

The Wild Atlantic Way might be a driving route, but you need to ditch the car to really

appreciate Connemara’s wild beauty. I walked on glorious deserted beaches, took a bracing stroll up Diamond Hill in Connemara National Park, and cycled an electric bike out on a loop from Clifden, the charming ‘capital’ of the region.

But the grand finale was a late-afternoon horse ride to Omey Island. Under overcast skies we galloped on sturdy cobs across the

sands to the tidal isle. Turning back, we grinned widely as the horses headed for home across the strand, splashing through pools of water, before automatically pulling up at the edge of the beach.

It was my last evening and so it was only fitting to celebrate in a bar. An American visitor I had met had commented on the friendliness of the locals; he had been taken aback when an attractive woman started talking to him in a bar but – when she invited him to join her boyfriend and friends at a table – he realised it was sheer friendliness and craic.

Equally, in Lowry’s Bar in Clifden, to a background of live traditional music, some of the locals chatted easily to me and my friends. One in particular insisted on buying us drinks, and offered to order us a taxi as an inducement to stay longer.

“But I need to leave early for a flight home,” I insisted.

“Come back next year,” he called as we left.

“I will,” I smiled. “I have to see a man about a horse...” 🐾





CONNEMARA ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

The nearest airport to Clifden, the main town in the Connemara region, is Knock (1.5-2hr drive). **Flybe** (flybe.com), **Ryanair** (ryanair.com) and **Aer Lingus** (aerlingus.com) all fly to Knock from various UK airports. Flight time from London is 1.5hrs; one-way fares start from around £20. Shannon is a 2-2.5hr drive from Clifden.

Buses from both airports, and from Dublin, run to Galway; **from Galway, buses run to Clifden** and some of the other places mentioned in this article – see **Bus Éirann** (buseireann.ie) and **Citylink** (citylink.ie).

To see the most of Connemara you will need to hire a car or bicycle.

Where to stay

The Lough Inagh Lodge (Recess; loughinaghlodgehotel.ie) is a welcoming country house hotel with beautiful views of the Maunturk and Twelve Bens ranges. Superb dining too. Two nights B&B plus one dinner costs from €180 (£140) pp.

The Quay House (thequayhouse.com) is Clifden's oldest building – it was the harbour master's house, a monastery and a convent before evolving into an award-winning guesthouse. Uniquely designed rooms (most have harbour views) cost from €75 (£58) pppn.

Ballynahinch Castle (Recess; ballynahinch-castle.com) is a luxury castle hotel, once home

to Humanity Jack, an 18th century MP and animal welfare campaigner. Fly fishing, clay pigeon shooting, cycling and walking are all available within the extensive grounds. B&B doubles from €170 (£132) pppn.

Food & drink

Seafood is very good – try the oysters, mussels, prawns, crab and lobster, and also trout and salmon. **Connemara lamb** is another speciality in season.

Mitchell's (mitchellsrestaurantclifden.com) in Clifden has won awards for its seafood. **O'Dowds** (odowdsseafoodbar.com) in Roundstone is a popular pub; try its chowder. **Lough Inagh Lodge** (see 'Where to stay') is highly recommended too.

Things to do

Electric bikes can be hired from **Bike Electric Connemara** (bikeelectric.ie) in Clifden; hire costs €40 (£31) a day.

The **Brazen Hussy** (brazenhussy.ie) can be chartered for scuba diving, fishing or island tours. Owner/skipper Shane Bisgood also teaches clay pigeon shooting at Ballynahinch Castle (connemara shootingschool.com). Alternatively, sail the coast in a 120-year-old Galway hooker (wildatlanticadventures.com) or explore Ireland's only fjord on a 90-minute cruise (killaryfjord.com).

Inishbofin can be reached by the **Island Discovery** mailboat (several sailings daily; 30 minutes; inishbofinislanddiscovery.com) or by charter (as above). The island has three hotels; **Doonmore Hotel** (doonmorehotel.com) has rooms from €40 (£31) pppn. For more info, see inishbofin.com.

Cleggan Beach Riding Centre runs low-tide horse treks to Omev Island (clegganridingcentre.com). **Connemara Equestrian Escapes** offers longer trails (connemaraequestrianescapes.com).

Live music can be found in many bars and restaurants, especially in summer. Lowry's (Clifden) has nightly live sessions, year-round. Best beaches include Gurteen Bay, Dogs Bay, Glassilaun and Sallerna. **Trá an Dóilín** is covered in pink coral-like sand.

Local specialist **Connemara Wild Escapes** (connemarawildescapes.ie) offers a range of activities and tours. **Killary Adventure Company** (Leenane; killaryadventure.com) offers adventure trips and days out. **WILD** (wildfullstop.com) offers all sorts of activities, from rock climbing and wild camping to hillwalking and birding.

Festivals & events

March Connemara Pony Spring Festival, Clifden (cpbs.ie)

April Clifden Traditional Music Festival (clifdentradfest.com)

May Connemara Mussel Festival, Leenane (connemaramusselfestival.com)

July Roundstone Pony, Dog & Sheep Show; Roundstone Regatta (roundstoneevents.com)

August Connemara Pony Show, Clifden

September All Ireland Champion of Champions Pony Show, Roundstone;

October Maam Cross Fair; Great Fjord Swim, Killary (thegreatfjordswim.com) ■

WIN a British walking holiday worth over £600

Whether you're looking for adventure or just to get away, the UK is full of amiable ambles – and **Mickledore** has the trip for you

So much of Britain's greatness lies an easy distance away from the big cities. With hundreds of trails crossing towns, cities, villages and rivers, the UK is the quintessential destination for ramblers and hikers alike. Think the epic Coast-to-Coast, the dramatic West Highland Way or the gentle South Downs Way – to name a few. And **Mickledore Walking Holidays** provides the ideal service to help you explore this country, organising your accommodation, transporting your luggage and providing detailed trip info – letting you forget the planning and enjoy the walking.

Recognised as one of the UK's top walking specialists, Mickledore offers over 20 routes with durations varying from three to 18 days. With a bit of luck, you could be experiencing one of these incredible trails first hand.

NAVIGATING NORTH

The coast-to-coast Hadrian's Wall Path is on many a walker's bucket list: this World Heritage site traverses the English borderlands with Scotland, peppered with milecastles

and waymarked by the Roman battlement itself. Stretching for 135km from Wallsend to the flat plains of the Solway Coast, it's an easygoing walk, letting you explore the historic forts and strongholds en route, like the jagged ruins of Thirlwall Castle. And that's not all, a three-day break is all about discovering the route on foot, not to mention where the wall is at its most intact: between Humshaugh and Gilsland.

STROLLING SOUTH

Prefer a more southerly saunter? The

Cotswold Way takes in 163km of timeless churches and village inns, twisting and turning for ever-changing views – from the rolling Malverns and Neolithic burial barrows to the Severn Estuary. Above all, you'll be overwhelmed by how

verdant Gloucestershire is: the

ancient commons, the vast bluebell meadows shaded by dense, fairytale forests, and a patchwork landscape of green. The stops are striking too: spend time strolling the historic cobbles of Bath or shopping in the market town of Chipping Campden.

Whatever landscape gets your trekking poles going, Mickledore has the walking experience your boots were made for.



HOW TO WIN

Mickledore Walking Holidays is offering you and a friend the chance to win a three-night self-guided walking holiday tackling your choice of trails: the Hadrian's Wall Path or the Cotswold Way. Accommodation, luggage transport, detailed mapping and local information will be organised for you. To enter, simply, answer the following:

Q: Which walking trail is the longest in the UK?

- a) The Pennine Way
- b) The South-West Coast Path
- c) The Pembrokeshire Coast Path

To enter and for full terms & conditions, go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions. Send your answer to the Wanderlust office (address p2). The closing date is 18 March 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or sponsors

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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

■ Your Story

Surviving New Year snow

In early 2015, Kyoto had its largest snowfall in almost 60 years. Reader **Rachelle Meilleur** got through it – just about



New Year's Day started beautifully, with a crystal-blue sky. By noon, however, the clouds had rolled in and the first few snowflakes began drifting down. By the time I finished lunch there were almost two inches of sticky wet snow clinging to everything. It looked like a winter wonderland – could this be Japan? I hadn't seen snow even remotely like this here in over a decade.

Then the internal debate began. Should I go to the shrine for *hatsumode* (the first Shinto shrine visit of the new year)? The shrine in question, Fushimi Inari Shrine – arguably the most famous in Kyoto – would be swarming; it receives up to four million visitors in the new year. But it was cold and wet, which would likely keep people away. Plus, I might be able to take atmospheric photos of the shrine in snow. So I went.

There weren't that many people on the train. But, once I arrived, I found thousands and thousands of visitors. There were men in uniforms controlling when people could enter or leave the station. As always in these situations, it's best to (literally) go with the flow, follow the crowd and stick to its pace.

Surprisingly, the walk up to the shrine was not as bad as I would have thought, even though the entire walkway leading up to the shrine was lined on both sides with vendors selling everything from grilled *mochi* (sticky rice) balls to large sausages on sticks. On my way up behind the shrine I passed men emptying out bulging collection boxes. I can only

imagine how much money shrines bring in during the first few weeks of new year – probably most of their income.

Well, I have to admit it was very atmospheric walking through the torii gates with the snow, even with the people. But it was impossible to get any good photos because of both. Most snow that falls in Japan is the wet, sticky kind, and it was coming down in clumps – not great for camera gear. And with the amount of people there, distracted (as most people are when they are in groups) and carrying weapons (umbrellas) that will put your eyes out, it was actually kind of dangerous to stop and take a photo unless you could get off the main path somewhere. That being said, I saw plenty of people try to take photos within the gates, especially selfies, and they got totally knocked around.

By the time I got to the first stop point I realised I was playing a losing game. So I bought some charms for the new year, and a *hamaya* (an arrow to ward off misfortune and attract good luck). At Fushimi Inari you could choose an *eto-hamaya* with one of four choices of *ema* (prayer/wish plaques). As this is now the year of the sheep/ram (take your pick), they all featured sheep or rams of varying designs. I chose one bearing a large sheep and the red torii gates of Fushimi. I really like it when shrines incorporate some feature of themselves onto the *ema*.

With charms in hand, night drawing in and the slush freezing into ice, I somehow made it home without falling. And the snow kept coming. So I knew I would be going to Kinkaku-ji (the Golden Pavilion) first thing in the morning. I've always

wanted to photograph it in snow, and I knew that this would be my chance.

I ended up getting to the pavilion earlier than planned (about 30 minutes before opening) but it was lucky that I did. There were at least 250 people ahead of me, already waiting for the gate to open. And there were ten times that behind me by the time the gate opened.

I've been to Kinkaku-ji probably more than any other site in Kyoto and thought I knew what to expect, but I was in for a shock. When the gates opened at 9am there was a rush for the ticket counters like people trying to scramble for the remaining tickets of a nearly sold-out concert. I was in and out of there pretty quickly, but when I got to the viewing area it was already four-deep with people. Luckily I knew that, with patience, it's possible to get right up to the fence; it was lucky I did, because soon it was about 15-people deep and I was getting crushed. People were under me, on top of me, crawling up on my camera bag. I've never seen such disregard for human life!

Luckily I don't panic in those types of crowds and know how to hold my ground. However, at one point I had visions of people being trampled to death, which had happened in Shanghai just a few days before – and I now understood exactly how. I've seen Kinkaku-ji at other peak times of the year (cherry blossom season, maple-leaf viewing), but none of those come close to the press of humanity (if you can call it that) that was there to get a snapshot of the temple in the snow. I suppose the fact that it happens so rarely, coupled with people having not much to do while on new year holiday, made it the perfect storm of tourist madness.

I was finally able to escape the grounds. Less than an hour had passed since I entered, but already the number of people was increasing and the snow was melting. Huge clumps were raining down from the sky, freed from branches and power lines by the warming sun (and maybe birds).

As I went to catch my bus I had to push past the thousands of people making their way to the front gate. If I'd thought 9am was bad, roam was much worse! I quickly scuttled all my plans to visit other famous sites in the snow, knowing that it would be an exercise in frustration, given the number of people and the very dangerous ice beneath my feet.

However, with more snow forecast for that evening, I knew I would have another chance to capture Kyoto in the snow. The hard part was determining where I would go next.

Got a travel tale to tell? Post your stories on:

wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust ▶

■ Your Story

SIGNS OF MADNESS

In the December/January issue, we asked if you'd come across any silly signs on your travels. Guess what? You had – loads of them! Thanks to our readers; here are a few that particularly tickled us. But if you think you can do better, send them in: fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk.



Sign images from: Tim Wilson, Nicholas Fry, Matthew Lightfoot, Liz & Bob, Susan Payer



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, volcano memories, more travel trailblazers, Slovak gorge strolls, cheap Thai trips and mighty Haiti

◀ Snap unhappy

When travelling, I'm often asked if I'll take a photo for another traveller. I am normally happy to oblige; often the favour is reciprocated. I wonder, though, if anyone else has noticed an increasing demandingness in requests for holiday snaps?

On Mt Quilotoa in Ecuador I was approached by two tourists; it was not until they had inspected five photos that they were satisfied and I was allowed to proceed. In Malaysia, a request for a photo came with a list of demands: "I want a close-up, a landscape version with more background and then a portrait of the same". The man could hardly hide his disdain when he saw my efforts had fallen short of his artistic vision.

I'm all for helping people to capture their travel memories, but they should remember that, firstly, a favour is being done, and secondly, with most people being amateur photographers, the results may not always be perfect! Otherwise I advise that they invest in a selfie-stick.

Michael Deoraj, Stamford, Lincs

Magic memories

I enjoyed reading the article on Nyiragongo volcano [issue 152, Dec/Jan] – it brought back great memories of my trip in July 1989.

I climbed the volcano with a French couple. On arriving at the small tin hut at the top, the mist had settled in. We walked five minutes to the crater's edge and saw absolutely nothing – quite terrifying knowing there was an abyss just ahead! A few

★ STAR LETTER ★

Self-publishing pride

Thanks for recognising self-publishing in your Masterclass (issue 153). After my UK-Singapore overland drive, I was asked to speak about my travels. The talks went well, and people kept saying I should write a book. However, the sense of achievement I felt on finishing *Beetle Drive* was soon quashed when rejection letters from publishers started rolling in!

Initially I turned my nose up at the idea of self-publishing but decided to go for it. I've kept the cover price low, so only earn a 97p royalty per sale. It's not going to pay for my next adventure but every now and then I receive feedback from complete strangers who have read my book and been inspired to live their own dreams. That's what makes it worthwhile.

Fiona Easterby, Surrey



days later I took a cargo boat down Lake Kivu then visited the Susa mountain gorillas in Virunga, Rwanda. A great trip; thanks for the reminder.

Steve Tapner, Somerset

Missed heroes

Your Travel Trailblazers list [issue 152, Dec/Jan], celebrating 21 travel pioneers, was notable for its exclusions as much as its merited inclusions. Surely George Bradshaw, pioneer of rail travel guides, who wrote his guidebooks as the railway epoch reached its peak 100 years ago, deserved a mention? Or Jack Kerouac, Beat Generation novelist, who encouraged young Americans to search for adventure in *On the Road*?
Nigel Cox, Hinckley, Leics

Beach challenge

I was pleased you included Long Beach, Vancouver Island, as one of your Secret Beaches [issue 151, Nov 2014]. However, you state that the 75km West Coast Trail starts at the end of Long Beach; it actually begins further south, stretching from Port Renfrew to Bamfield. In between that and Long Beach are the Broken Group Islands, idyllic for kayakers. North of Ucluelet lies the amazing 16km Long Beach, famous for its surfing.

These are not secrets to Canadians but the rest of the world still has to discover their glory. Come on all of you who revel in the great outdoors: challenge your abilities and head for the Pacific Coast!

Jane Vincent-Havelka, Canada

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Fiona!



Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Bangladesh
Wanderlust reader
Alan Holmwood
has just returned
from a 16-day trip
across busy
Bangladesh, South Asia

The highlight: Fishing with otters in the Sundarbans.

Must see: The terracotta temples at Kantanagar (pictured) and Puthia.

Top tip: Go with a Bangladesh company. Ours took us into small villages where we got invited into houses and were offered food etc. On our own we would have thought we were imposing but they seemed to welcome us.



Cautionary tale: Hotel meals can be poor value; go out to eat in the restaurants or roadside stalls.

I wish I'd known... How foggy it would get – I might have chosen another time to travel, but would then have caught the rain.

Anything else? The locals are often as keen to get photos of you as you are of them. As well as being asked if they could take our photo we often spotted a crafty snapper slyly doing it.

This month you have been mostly...

W Exploring Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The highlight? Seeing tigers in the wild on my birthday. *Kajami*

T This year I'm definitely going to aim to tick off most of @wanderlustmag travel resolutions and seize the day! *LesleyAnnBirley*

f Reading interview with the legendary Bill Bryson. *A Walk in the Woods* is one of my top ten books of all time. *John Dwyer*

W Visiting the cemetery in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. It was like a Haitian version of Highgate, but with Christian tombs dating back to 1800. A very poignant tomb of 10,000 earthquake victims has a huge guardian angel metal sculpture on top. *JanieB*

f Getting inspired by Top 50 Trips feature. I think if you go on these 50 trips, you've probably covered most parts of the world!

Caroline Dunn

T Championing Haiti. Great article in @wanderlustmag about #Haiti. Getting the exposure it deserves. *JackiesJourneys*

W Booking budget excursions in Thailand. Koh Phi Phi day trip was stunning and very cheap. It involved visiting Maya Beach and Monkey Island. Also included free lunch and a 30-minute snorkel; best £8 I've spent! *James-Cassidy13*

T Planning the next adventure. I have 2 weeks in September: #SriLanka or #Colombia? *NaomiVCole*

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Mother's cooking

Karen Morris

I visited the Longsheng rice fields in China, and the woman in the photo carried my backpack for me. The next day I was invited to her home. I was there for some time so got to know the family a little better. They soon forgot I was taking pictures while they busied themselves making food.

I never use a flash; it's harder to take photos in low light but I have learned these are the best shots. I've even taught myself not to breathe when taking a shot like this! I always force the flash off and follow the light. I never usually have time to put up a tripod – you lose the moment.



TALK TO US: Online at www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust. **Email** letters & photos to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk. **Mail** Wanderlust, 1 Leworth Place, Windsor SL4 1EB. **Twitter** @wanderlustmag. **Facebook** www.facebook.com/wanderlusttravelmagazine

TRAVEL PHOTOS OF THE YEAR 2014

Every year we're in awe of the images that make the shortlist for our annual travel photo competition. Read on to see the spectacular finalists, find out who came out top, see what the judges' thought, and learn which of our winners will be sent off on a photo commission

Wanderlust



 THE INDEPENDENT



THE JUDGES

Lyn Hughes

*Wanderlust co-founder
and editor-in-chief*

Paul Goldstein

*Award-winning wildlife
photographer and guide*

Paul Harris

*Award-winning travel and
landscape photographer*

Steve Davey

*Professional travel
photographer and author*

Sophie Lam

*Head of travel,
The Independent*

Simon Calder

*Senior travel editor
The Independent*

Sam North

*Show director, Clarion
Events (for Destinations
Travel Show)*

Rob Hawthorne

*Clarion Events (for
Destinations Travel Show)*

Jonathan Menz

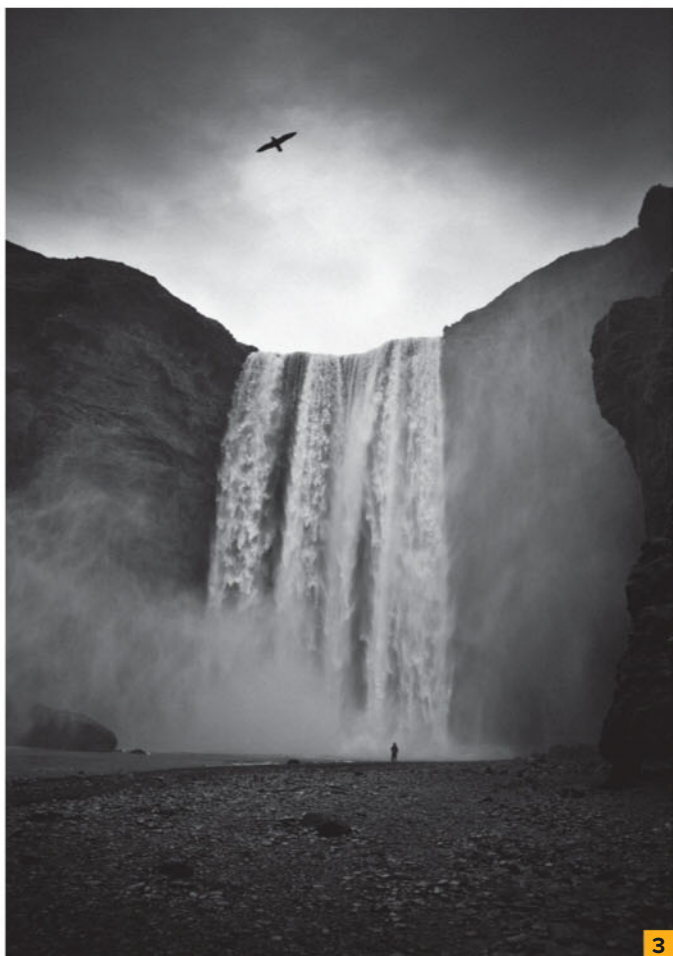
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Tom Wells

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Andy Brown

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1 October lights
Hemnes, Nordland, Norway

Tommy Eliassen, Fish vaccinator

Judges' comments: "Loving this – a little posed but does anyone *not* want to be here?"

Nikon D800, Nikon 14-24mm
f/2.8G ED AF-S lens @ 14mm,
13 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 2500

(Pictured previous page)

HIGHLY COMMENDED

2 Spirit of Rio
Corcovado, Rio, Brazil

*Benjamin Robert Goodwin,
International media relations
manager*

Judges' comments: "Not arrived at by coincidence. New light, old window"; "Fleeting and atmospheric. Having some of the buildings lit and some in the shadows adds great effect to the urban sprawl."

Nikon 1 V1, Nikon 10-30mm
f/3.5-5.6 lens @ 18.2mm,
1/200 sec @ f/4.5, ISO 100

3 The bird at the falls
Skógafoss, Iceland

Damian Fowkes, Graphic designer

Judges' comments: "Perhaps Iceland's most photographed waterfall given a monochromatic makeover. Simple and superb"; "At last – a suitable use for a black and white shot!"

Canon EOS 5D Mk I, EF 28-135mm
f/3.5-5.6 lens @ 28mm,
1/320 sec @ f/3.5, ISO 200

4 Land of Mordor, Mt Bromo,
Java, Indonesia

*Khairul Anuar Che Ani,
Self-employed*

Judges' comments: "It might be something of a cliché – sunrise through fog – but flawlessly executed"; "Low cloud, mist and backlight creates great mystery and the elevated viewpoint is a great perspective."

Canon EOS 5D Mk II, EF 70-200mm
f/2.8 IS USM lens @ 140mm,
1/200 sec @ f/16, ISO 200





5 Bluebells in the mist
Nettlebed, Oxfordshire, UK

Ceri Jones, IT consultant
Judges' comments: "Classic English scene – exquisitely photographed"; "A difficult balance of light, shade and colour, rendered beautifully, draws you along the path."
 Canon EOS 6D, Canon 17-40mm L series f/4L lens @ 40mm, 0.6 sec @ f/14, ISO 100

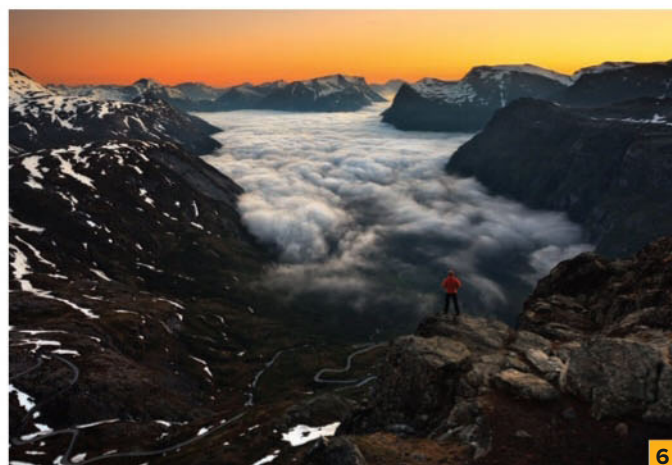
6 Lonely
Dalsnibba, Norway
Krzysztof Browko, IT specialist
Judges' comments: "Such a sense of drama, and wonderfully captured colours."
 Canon EOS 5D Mk II, Canon EF17-40mm f/4L USM lens @ 26mm, 0.6 sec @ f/11, ISO 100

7 Wanderers above the sea of fog
Mt Bromo, Java, Indonesia
Maher Hayfa, Website designer
Judges' comments: "Fantastically evocative picture with perfect composition."
 Canon EOS 5D Mk III, EF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM lens @ 135mm, 1/1600 sec @ f/4, ISO 100

RUNNER-UP
8 Illuminate the Dead Sea
Dead Sea, Israel
Daniel Winter, Director of sales
Judges' comments: "A great documentary image, with sombre symbolism. An adventurous shot"; "Have you ever seen the Dead Sea like this? I haven't! Technically brilliant, superbly observed."
 Nikon D7100, Sigma 10-20mm f/4-5.6 lens @ 15mm, 71 sec @ f/5, ISO 200



5



6



7



8



9

9 Prokoshko lake Prokoshko, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Marko Stamatovic, Graphic designer

Judges' comments: "A real sense of mystery, caught at the perfect time of day, with a sense of culture and story."

Canon EOS 5D Mk II, Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L USM lens @ 16mm, 1/30 sec @ f/6.3, ISO 250

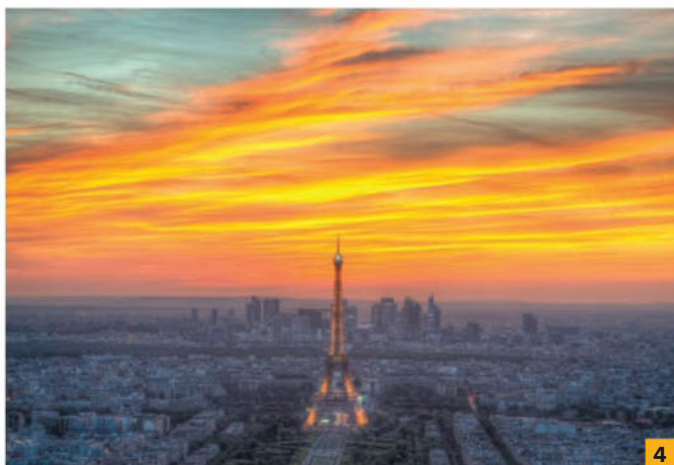
W WINNER

Penguins, South Shetlands Deception Island, Antarctica

Fred Barrington, Retired

Judges' comments: "Wow, this is a very inaccessible area and it is very difficult not to use a long lens. Brilliant. The people are critical"; "Beautiful rendition of raw landscape with a subtle sense of scale."

Nikon D90, Nikon 70-300mm f/4.5-5.6 VR lens @ 82mm, 1/250 sec @ f/7.1, ISO 200 (Pictured on page 6)



HIGHLY COMMENDED

1 Twin pagodas

Ngwe-Saung Beach, Patheingyi, Burma (Myanmar)

Zay Yar Lin, Seafarer

Judges' comments: "Wow – got it all. Interest, light and the rest of the chocolate factory: the galaxy and the Milky Way"; "A great balance of natural and artificial light, with a feeling of permanence and culture."

Nikon D600, Nikkor 14-24mm f/2.8G lens @ 14mm, 20 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 2000

2 The secret life of sculptures

London, UK

Linda Rieksta, Student photographer

Judges' comments: "Beautiful light – lovely angle."

Canon EOS 500D, standard 18-55mm lens @ 46mm, 1/80 sec @ f/8, ISO 100

3 Temples at dawn

Bagan, Burma (Myanmar)

Andy Ferrington, Airline pilot

Judges' comments:

"Marvellous crop, fantastic composition of shapes, and taken at exactly the right time of day"; "Pulling in balloons and temples with a long lens enhances the gorgeous light and graphic landscape."

Nikon D700 Sigma, Sigma 70-200mm f/2.8 lens with converters @ 360mm, 1/125 sec @ f/11, ISO 200

WINNER

Rising

South Bank, London, UK

Madeleine Fitzsimons, Art editor

Judges' comments:

"Ridiculously brilliant. Shot a billion times but not like this. Composition, cohesion and all of the criteria ticked here."

Canon EOS 60D, EF 50mm f/1.8 II lens @ 50mm, 1/2000 sec @ f/1.8, ISO 100

(Pictured on page 8)

4 Fiery Parisian sunset

From the Tour Montparnasse, Paris, France

Nick Jackson, Wall decor design consultant

Judges' comments: "Glorious shot. A great view of a fantastic subject"; "Having the Eiffel Tower centred breaks the composition rules effectively. Great contrast of blue shadows and dusky sky."

Nikon D7000, AF-S DX Nikkor 16-85mm f/3.5-5.6G ED VR lens @ 56mm, 1/6 sec @ f/16, ISO 100

5 Hunts Mesa

Monument Valley, USA

Francesco Riccardo Iacomino, Lawyer

Judges' comments: "Incredibly beautiful light. I love the flatness of the shot."

Canon EOS 550D, Canon EF-S55-250mm f/4-5.6 lens @ 84mm, 1/30 sec @ f/8, ISO 100

RUNNER-UP

6 Bo-Kaap houses



Cape Town, South Africa

Vinesh Rajpaul, Student

Judges' comments: "Great shot. Looks like a montage – but real. Surreal and engaging"; "Prettily colourful, wonderfully composed, even a little confusing – which adds to the image."

Nikon D90, Tamron 70-300mm f/4-5.6 VC lens @ 260mm, 1/1250 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 200





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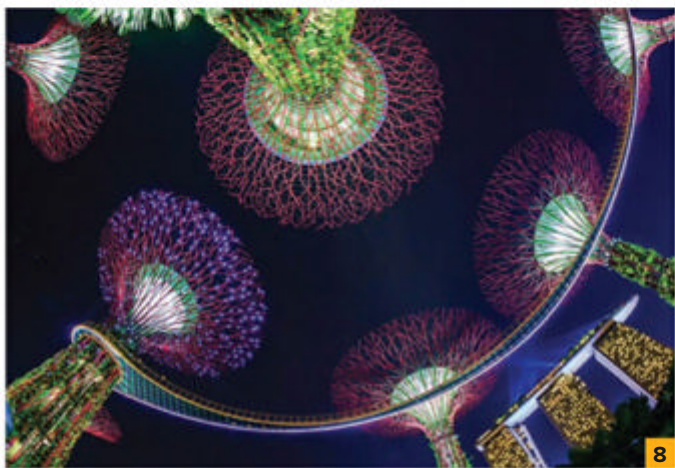
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7



8



9

7 Venetian storm
Venice, Italy

James Howard, Accountant

Judges' comments: "Great angle. And sums up my experience of Venice so many times!"; "An unusual view of Venice, giving a great sense of arrival or departure. I like the combination of rough seas and delicate architecture."

Canon EOS 5D Mk II, EF 24-105mm f/4 L IS USM UV filter lens @ 55mm, 1/320 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 800

8 Adorned with lights
Gardens by the Bay, Singapore

Srinivasa Prasath, Software applications developer

Judges' comments: "This image makes you think: what exactly am I looking at? The angle creates great intrigue."

Canon EOS 450D, Rokinon 8mm f/3.5 HD fisheye lens @ 8mm, 30 sec @ f/11, ISO 100

9 Mosque at Maghrib
Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Tim Jones, English teacher

Judges' comments: "Balancing natural and artificial light in the shot lends itself perfectly to the traditions of this building."

Olympus OMD E-M5, Olympus M ZUIKO 12-50mm f/3.5-6.3 EZ lens @ 13mm, 1/60 sec @ f/4, ISO 400



❶ Intha fishermen
Inle Lake, Burma (Myanmar)

Michele Martinelli, Restorer

Judges' comments: "An absolute classic"; "I love the symmetry of the fishermen, viewed through the lens of their nets – great composition and context."

Nikon D5000, AF-S Nikkor 10-24mm f/3.5-4.5 lens @ 10mm, 1/200 sec @ f/11, ISO 200

❷ Apu and Durga
West Bengal, India

Shaikh Jan Mohammasad, Art director

Judges' comments: "Great light, great angle."

Canon EOS 100, Canon 28-105mm lens, 1/125 sec @ f/8, ISO 200

RUNNER-UP

❸ Chinese night market
Xi'an, China

Maarten Boersema, Pastor

Judges' comments:

"Atmosphere is key to this person at work in harsh conditions."

Canon EOS 5D, EF 35mm f/1.4L USM lens @ 35mm, 1/160 sec @ f/3.2, ISO 320

❹ Morning Prayer
Bagan, Burma (Myanmar)

Khant Zaw, Mechanical engineer

Judges' comments:

"The contrast of light and dark really conveys the spirituality of the place."

Canon EOS 6D, Tokina 10-17mm lens @ 15mm, 3.2 sec @ f/13, ISO 400

HIGHLY COMMENDED

❺ Last post at the
general stores
Mathry, Wales

Alex Graeme, Tour guide

Judges' comments: "Classic shot, beautiful composition"; "Like a Ken Loach film set. Stereo colours, timeless, sad and touching. Just lovely";

"The time taken to compose this image has paid dividends, revealing so many fine, cultural and timeless details."

Nikon D7000, Nikon AF Nikkor 50mm f/1.8D lens @ 50mm, 1/125 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 200

❻ Scarface
Pancevo, Serbia

Marko Stamatovic

Graphic designer

Judges' comments: "The eye contact in this image is crucial. A powerful documentary of a marginal culture."

Canon EOS 40D, Canon 10-22mm f/3.5-4.5 lens @ 10mm, 1/500 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 200

WINNER

The Karaoke King
Hpa An, Burma (Myanmar)

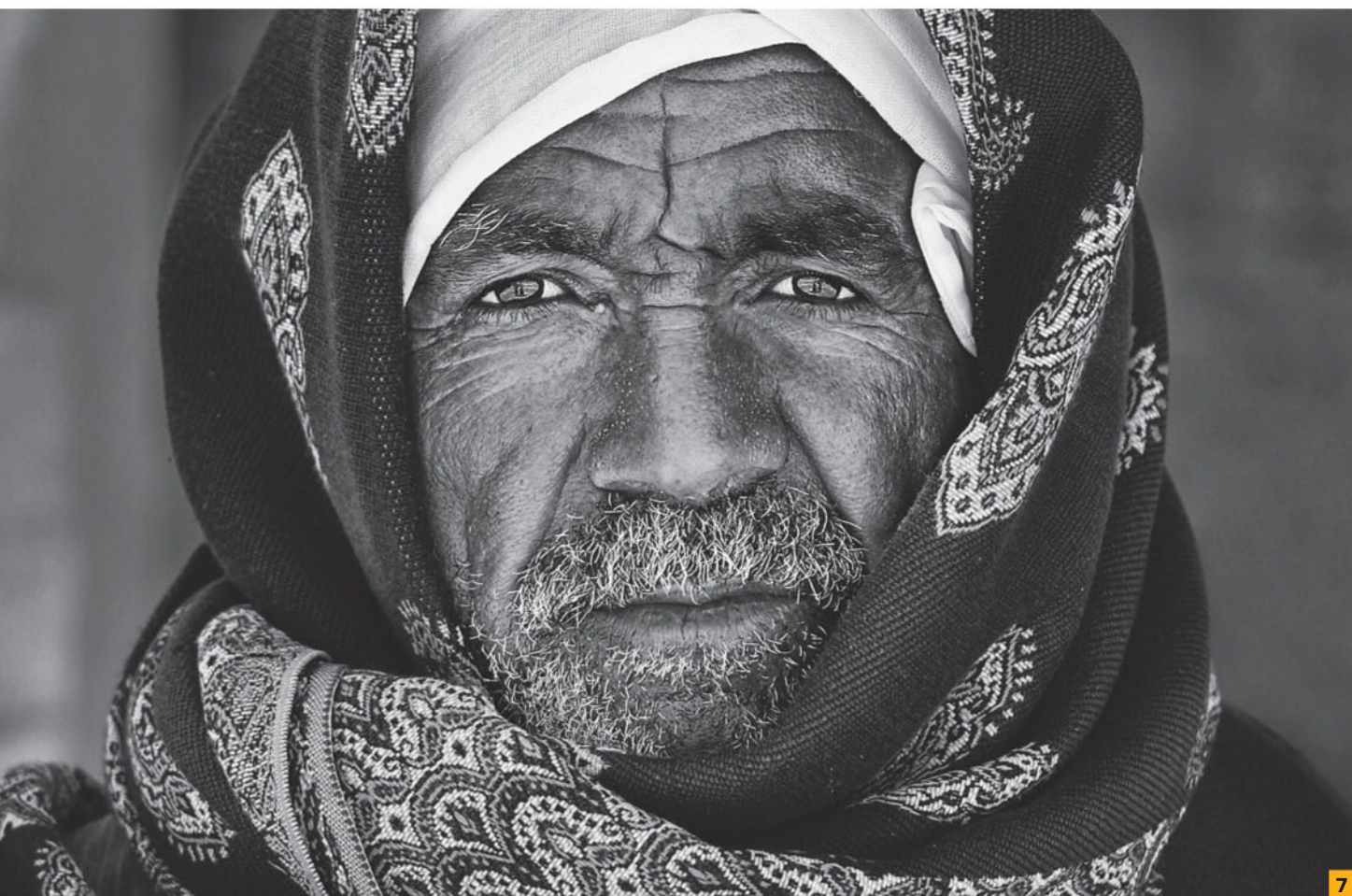
Allan Dransfield, Automotive designer

Judges' comments:

"Fantastic shot. I can almost hear the wailing"; "It has virtually everything"; "Look around the image and the story is ever expanding – so many great details."

Canon EOS 5D Mk III, Canon 16-35mm II L series f/2.8 lens @ 16mm, 1/25 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 2000
(Pictured on page 10)





7 Egyptian portrait
Luxor, Egypt

Mohammed Abd El Kader
Engineer

Judges' comments: "What a face! You imagine there are many stories behind those deep, engaging eyes."

Canon EOS 600D, EF 50mm f/1.8 lens @ 50mm, 1/800 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 200

8 Tradition ain't scary
Guerra, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Emilio Rodriguez
Architecture student

Judges' comments: "Amazing moment. A great record of an interesting culture."

Nikon D40, 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 lens @ 18mm, 1/2000 sec @ f/3.5, ISO 1600



9 Maasai tribeswoman
Diani, Kenya

Sanjay Gupta
Consultant heart specialist

Judges' comments: "Striking and dignified portrait";
"Beautiful photo of a beautiful

lady. No intrusion, no nonsense; a moment immaculately caught"; "An arresting, natural portrait. Great eye contact."

Canon EOS 5D Mk II, Canon 70-200mm f/2.8 lens @ 200mm, 1/200 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 500





RUNNER-UP

① The migration of locusts Ranohira, Madagascar

Michele Martinelli, Restorer

Judges' comments: "I love the smallness of the person on the ground, and the sense of scale that it gives"; "Biblical – a monstrous shot. A plague on this photographer!"; "The figure caught among the swarm is brilliantly placed, with great light in the layered background"; "you feel that you can almost hear the noise."

Nikon D5000, AF-S Nikkor

70-300mm f/4.5-5.6 lens @ 122mm,
1/200 sec @ f/10, ISO 400

② Snake tongue (*checkered keelback*) Tadoba National Park, Chandrapur, India

Yuwaraj Gurjar, Textiles

Judges' comments: "Really nice approach and focus."

Nikon D90, Tamron 180mm macro
lens @ 180mm, 1/60 sec @ f/18,
ISO 200

③ In the yellow (*cattle egrets*) Parco naturale di Migliarino, San Rossore, Italy

Giovanni Frescura, Lawyer

Judges' comments: "Handsome shot – really atmospheric"; "Utterly beautiful"; "Truly dazzling play of down light and birdlife – it gives a real sense of playfulness."

Canon EOS 1D Mk III, Canon ES
300mm f/2.8 lens @ 300mm,
1/2500 sec @ f/3.2, ISO 200



1



2



3



4



5

4 **Eles from heaven**
South Luangwa National Park,
Zambia

Marc Mol, Retired

Judges' comments: "Excellent
angle. Classic composition."

Nikon D3S, Nikkor 70-200mm

f/2.8 lens @ 98mm,

1/6400 sec @ f/4, ISO 1600

5 **Great grey owl hunting**
for voles
Lappi, Finland

John Hunt, Sales director

Judges' comments: "Simply,
the moment caught."

Canon EOS 5D, Canon 28-135mm

lens @ 135mm, 1/1000 sec @ f/10,

ISO 400





8

**6 It's raining again
(bear cubs)**
Lake Clark, Alaska, USA

*Deborah Dunderdale,
Police officer*

Judges' comments: "Great angle, no crossover, and the rain is a bonus"; "A great portrait in less than ideal conditions, which gives a sense of place and relationships."

Canon EOS 1DX, Canon EF 200-400mm f/4L lens @ 280mm, 1/200 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 6400

HIGHLY COMMENDED

7 Lava heron taking a shower
Isabela Island, Galápagos, Ecuador

Andy Barnes, Construction project manager

Judges' comments: "I just love this – rare bird, brilliant and pure. Lovely all round. Catches a moment magnificently"; "A real captured moment showing sense of place and determination, character and behaviour"; "Very well timed. Captures a really predatory feel."

Nikon D800, Nikon 105mm f/2.8 lens @ 105mm, 1/1250 sec @ f/6.3, ISO 640

8 Eye contact (cheetah cubs)
Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa

*Dr Alexander Riek,
Animal scientist*

Judges' comments: "Very high on the aaaaaah-factor cuteness scale. But also sharp and well-composed, with a lovely colour palette."

Nikon D800, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8G lens @ 200mm, 1/640 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 100

9 Alien (long-legged fly)
Oldenburg, Germany

Patrick Lienin, ecologist

Judges' comments: "The narrow but very sharp focus lends itself perfectly to the subject. Eerie, alien and wondrous"; "Amazing colours and use of focus."

Nikon D90, Tamron 60mm f/2 macro lens @ 60mm, 1/250 sec @ f/4, ISO 1250



9

WINNER

10 Red-footed falcon
Hortobágy, Hungary

*John Webster,
Retired structural engineer and construction manager*

Judges' comments: "Great shot. I love the contrast between the blur of the bird's wings and the sharpness of its head." "Utterly magnificent.

Imaginative, difficult and – at that speed – a huge gamble, which paid off brilliantly"; "The eye contact, movement of spray

and ruffled feathers caught brilliantly, with real impact"; "Tremendous shot. Stillness and movement combine with great colours."

Nikon D800, Nikon 500mm f/4 telephoto lens @ 500mm, 1/125sec @ f/7.1, ISO 2000
(Pictured on page 12)



WINNER
JAN KOSTAL
TOUR GUIDE

1 Endless crowd

Nandgaon, Uttar Pradesh, India

Hundreds of people rush to a Hindu temple to celebrate Holi Puja.

Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 lens @ 17mm, 4 sec @ f/9, ISO 1000

2 Roll over the colour

Nandgaon, Uttar Pradesh, India

A man bathes in bright 'holy' colours after the Holi Puja ceremony.

Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 lens @ 17mm, 1/250 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 1600

3 Ecstasy

Nandgaon, Uttar Pradesh, India

The ecstasy of a woman who glimpsed the deity statue for a while during the ceremony.

Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 lens @ 17mm, 1/200 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 2000

4 Devotees

Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India

Pilgrims and devotees, photographed from the balcony of Bankey Bihari Temple.



Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 lens @ 25mm, 10 sec @ f/22, ISO 100

5 Hands

Nandgaon, Uttar Pradesh, India

Ladies' hands after prayer.

Nikon D700, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 lens @ 26mm, 1/125 sec @ f/3.5, ISO 1600

Australia's Nature Coast: wildlife, beauty and lots of adventure

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The Fraser Coast

Uniting UNESCO-listed Fraser Island with the Great Barrier Reef, the Fraser Coast's shoreline is fringed by rainforests and contains some of the planet's biggest wildlife experiences. Humpback whales visit Hervey Bay between

mid-July and November, when thousands migrate to frolic in this natural playground.

Fraser Island offers visitors a fresh blast of adventure by land, air or sea, whether it's an aerial tour over its sands, lakes and rainforests, cruising across the Great Sandy Straits wetlands or hiking Fraser Island's Great Walk. The birdwatching here is as impressive as the scenery – you can spot over 350 species.

Remarkably, the underwater wildlife is even more diverse: over 1,500 marine species live at the coral cay of Lady Elliot Island – including green and loggerhead turtles, manta rays and humpbacks – making it a Mecca for diving. Meanwhile on the 100km motor along The Great Beach Drive – taking in the Fraser and Sunshine Coasts – you're likely to roll past kangaroos, dingoes and even the odd whale.

The Sunshine Coast

Boasting 300 days of glorious sol each year, it's easy to see how this coast earned its name. From the rolling surf and secluded sands of Rainbow Bay, to the majestic Tin Can Bay – where you can hand-feed wild dolphins – it's a postcard-perfect paradise. Australia Zoo

allows you to meet Oz's classic animals and see the crucial work done in its wildlife hospital.

Nature experiences abound too. The Noosa Biosphere Reserve alone boasts 1,500 km sq of wetlands, sand dunes and water inlets. Then there's the hinterland. Stretching through the UNESCO-listed-hills of the Glass House Mountains, you can discover many national parks here, as well as trying rock climbing, bush walking and abseiling.

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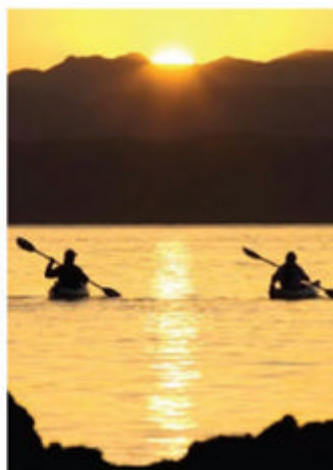
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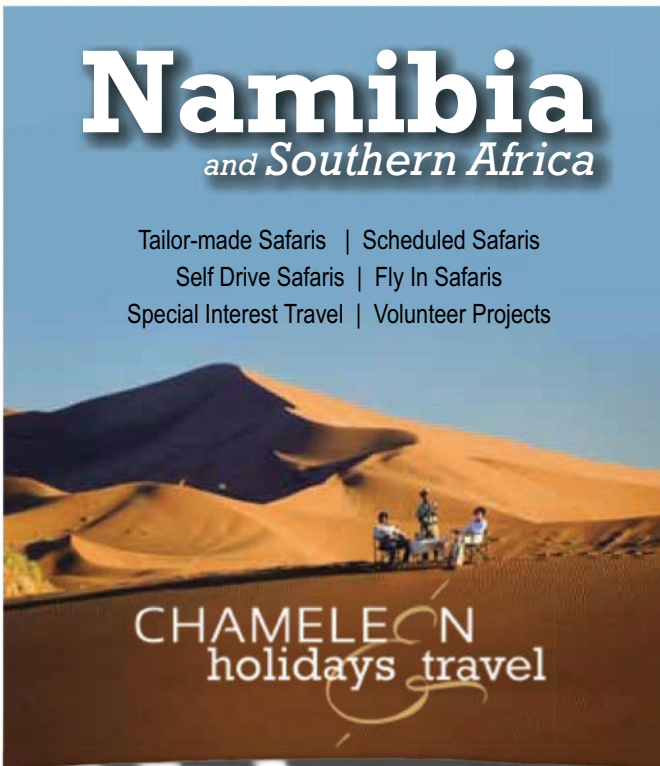
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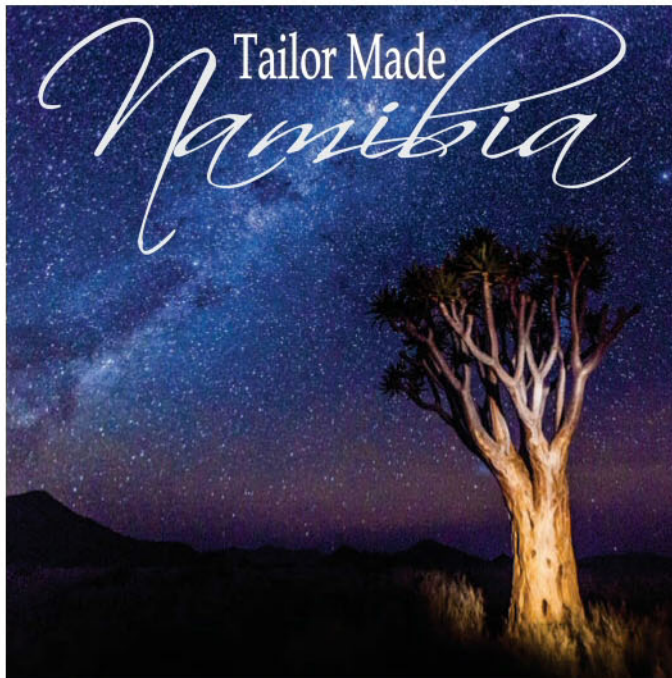
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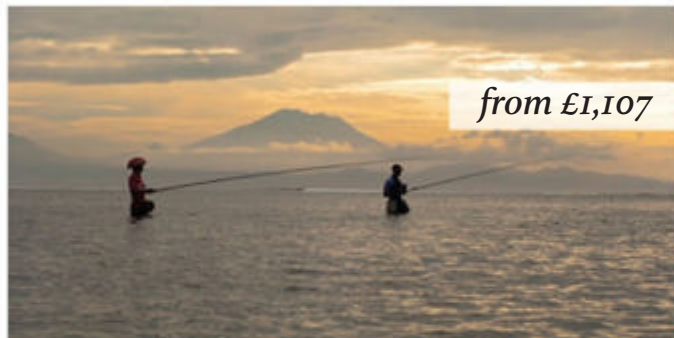
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Reports to: Customer Services Manager
Hours of work: 09:30-17:30, Mon-to-Fri

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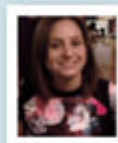
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Skills/Competencies:

- Outstanding written skills and attention to detail
- Confidence in dealing with clients on the telephone
- Excellent organisational skills and ability to effectively prioritise
- Ability to work as part of a team to achieve deadlines and targets
- Confidence in questioning information provided by 3rd parties
- Experience of working in a customer services role would be an advantage
- An interest in travel is essential

For more information please send your CV and covering letter by email to Rosie Lunt:
rosie.lunt@intrepidtravel.com

How I got into Travel



Kelly Hutchison

HR manager, PEAK group

Kelly loves working for PEAK Adventure Travel Group – a collection of specialist tour operators including Exodus, Trek America and Intrepid.

How long have you worked for PEAK group? Nearly three years.
What did you do before and what attracted you to the job?

Working in the travel industry as it's an exciting industry to be in and doing HR which I love, who wouldn't want to do that!

What is it like to work for the PEAK group? It's great and working across all the brands is fun as they are all so different culturally.

What do you like about being a HR manager? No day is ever the same, it keeps me stimulated and on my toes, which I like.

What challenges have you faced? Plenty! People are always challenging and so is the travel industry, put those two together and it's tough but I love it!

How has your career progressed at the company? My skillset has certainly broadened over my time here, I came from large corporate HR teams and now I am stand-alone so I have had to learn about learning and development, compensation and benefits, and payroll.
Tell us about your career highlights/favourite moments so far at PEAK group? It's more of a favourite feeling: my favourite feeling is pride as I watch my companies and their culture evolve, nothing beats a happy working environment!



AFRICA TRAVEL RESOURCE Safari Sales Consultant

Country: United Kingdom
Category: Tour Operators & Agents
Type: Permanent
Salary: £22-£30k, depending on experience, plus significant bonuses
Closing date: 12/03/2015

Africa Travel Resource is a small but market-leading tailor-made safari company. We are presently seeking people who are passionate and experienced in African Wildlife and/or the Safari Industry to work in our sales team, putting together tailor-made safaris for our customers from around the world.

Most likely you will have worked or travelled extensively in East and/or Southern Africa. Previous sales experience is an advantage but not necessarily important, we are more interested in finding people who are intelligent, logical, quick to learn, enthusiastic, motivated and happy to work within our small team environment.

Based: Dorking, Surrey

If you are interested please send your CV and covering letter to Jay Hanson on Jay.Hanson@africatravelresource.com

INTREPID TRAVEL.COM Sales Consultants

Country: Alton, United Kingdom
Category: Tour Operators & Agents
Type: Permanent
Salary: Competitive
Closing date: 12/03/2015

The purpose of this position is to maximise the sales of all Intrepid holidays over the phone, via e-mail and web to travel agents, and direct to customers.

Qualifications and Experience:

- Travel industry course and/or experience within the travel industry (essential)
- Personal and/or professional travel experience (essential)
- Experience of inbound telesales essential and outbound telesales would be advantageous
- Experience with telephone based customer service (essential)
- Experience working with computer booking systems (desired)

Skills and Attributes:

- Excellent phone manner and technique
- Commercially minded and driven to deliver results
- Energetic, unflappable with good attention to detail
- Ability to work efficiently without supervision
- Outstanding organisational skills
- High standards of customer service
- Excellent verbal communication skills
- An understanding of and belief in our Responsible Travel philosophy
- Friendly, flexible, adaptable
- Team player
- Responsible and reliable

If you have good travel sales experience and have the 'gift of the gab' all you need to do is get in touch at kelly.hutchison@intrepidtravel.com



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Sales Executive

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Travel Company Tales



Water By Nature

Hamish McMaster

Passionate river runner who also happens to be Water By Nature's managing director, ensuring rafting trips are fun and safe

How Water By Nature started?

Water By Nature started from small beginnings 18 years ago. While recovering from a kayaking injury, I decided I wanted to offer the best-of-the-best whitewater-based experiences from around the world. I had worked for many companies, in diverse destinations like Israel, Nepal and the Zambezi, but I had the yearning to explore more. I had received some info from a friend who had kayaked in Morocco and was intrigued, so I launched an 'exploratory' adventure where we planned to run two of three rivers out there in a week long adventure, filmed by an Israeli

film crew. In addition we had 'sold' the idea of this to guests who were keen to take the plunge and explore with us.

Early challenges

We loaded all of our gear onto my Peugeot 205 and drove to Morocco from London. Stopped, and later prosecuted, by the Kent Constabulary for 'misuse of a motor vehicle', we made our way to Morocco to meet our guests. We ran the Oum Er-Rbia and the Ahansel, the latter still being run by us now. Over 18 years later, we still drive out there, but now with a 17-seater transit van and double-axle trailer. One year when returning from the Zambezi we managed to get

460kg of luggage on the plane free of charge, along with six pieces of carry-on. My carry-on was full of plates and even a cheese grater – which was confiscated as a dangerous weapon. I questioned how many planes had been hijacked using a cheese grater? I relinquished the item, realising I had done well with my luggage allowance.

What makes Water By Nature unique?

We have chosen to stay a specialist in our field, mainly



because we love it. We have made it our pledge to share wonderful rivers with people, many of whom thought they couldn't possibly raft. Take Pat and Steven (in their seventies), on their first raft trip and honeymoon on the Zambezi. Serving them champagne and canapés, 65km down the Zambezi from Victoria Falls, helps us love our job as much as people love the trips.

Future plans?

We still have many rivers to explore and have aspirations to open up new frontiers, safety features and levels of comfort on trips. There is nothing better than a real adventure, powered by nature.
www.waterbynature.com



Find your trip on wanderlust.co.uk

Searching for a specialist tour operator? Whether you're after a fixed departure or a tailor-made trip, **Wanderlust's Trip Finder** and **Trip Wizard** tools can help you track down the ideal operator for your adventure of choice. Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk for more details.

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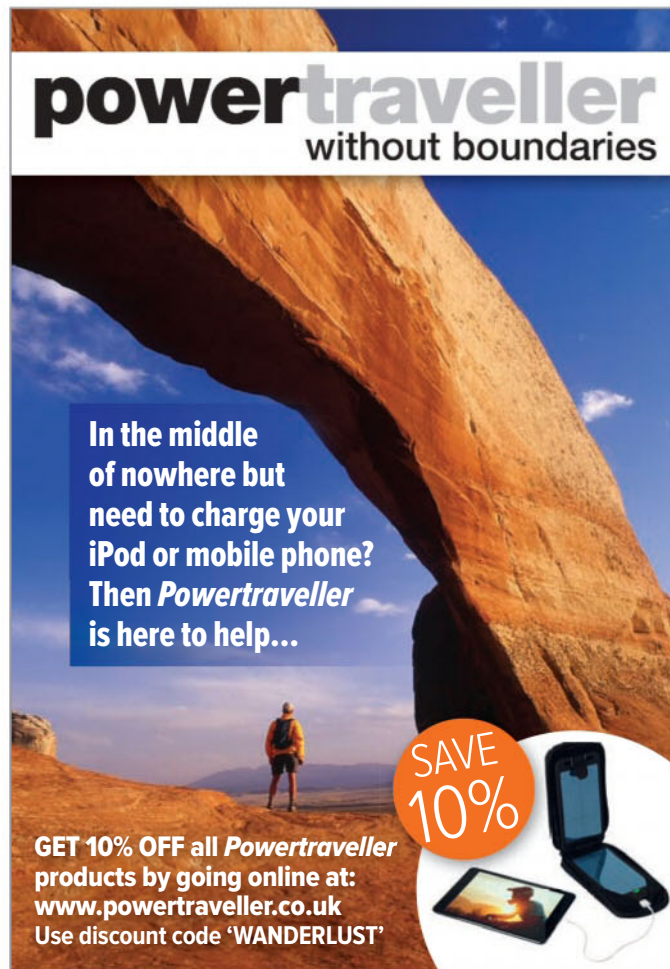
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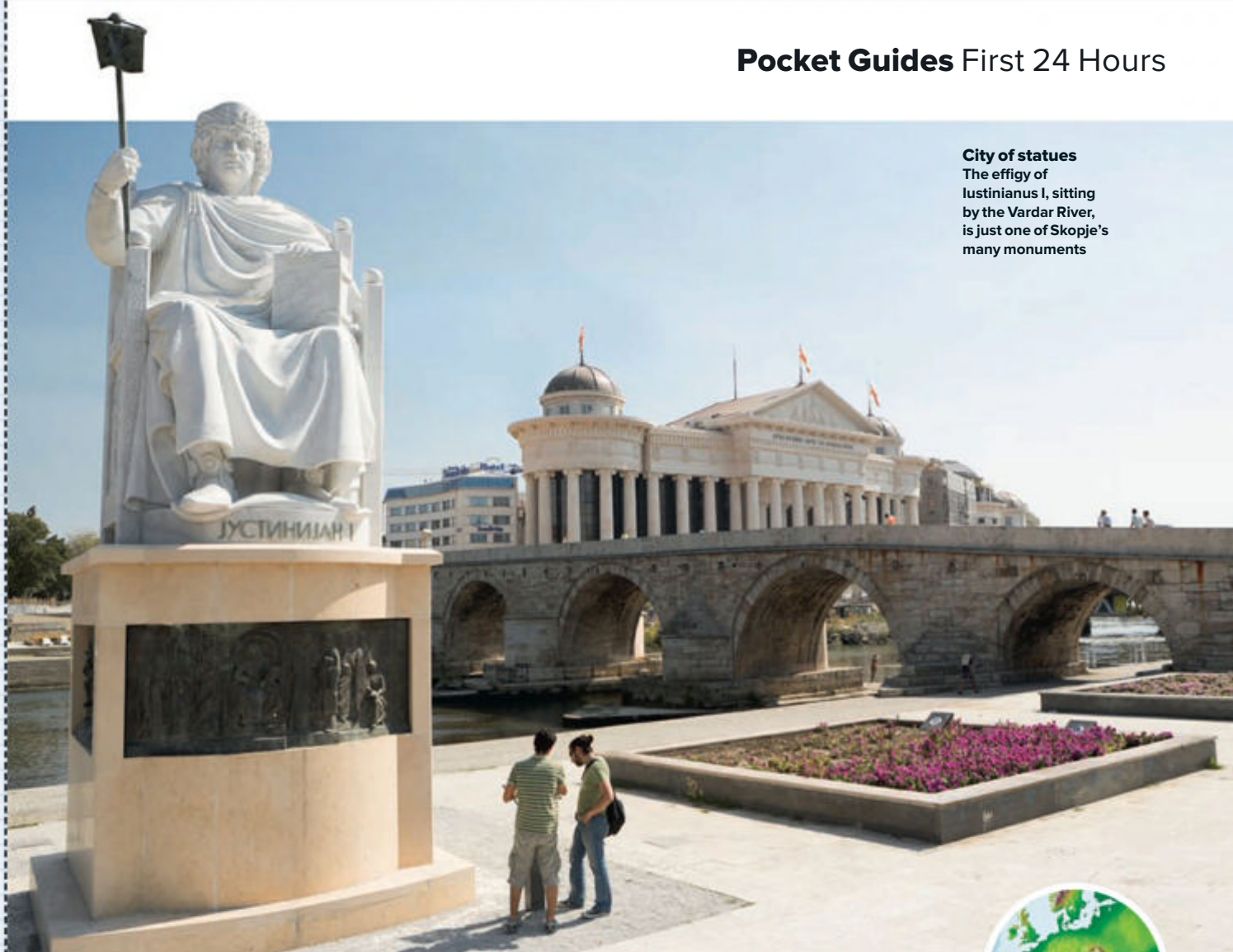
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City of statues

The effigy of Justinianus I, sitting by the Vardar River, is just one of Skopje's many monuments



Skopje, Macedonia

Thanks to a controversial regeneration project, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's capital is looking especially ship-shape. **Lyn Hughes** investigates...

i Before you arrive

In the dying days of 2014, the hoardings were finally removed from Skopje's Government Headquarters which, like many of the city's other official buildings, had been undergoing a major revamp. Gone was the rather utilitarian 1970s building. In its place: something that looks startlingly like the US White House.

Back in 1963, a major earthquake struck Skopje just before dawn, destroying around 80% of its buildings; the replacements were typically concrete and Communist in style. However, that is gradually changing thanks to the controversial Skopje 2014 project. Hundreds of millions of euros have been spent on constructing or making-over buildings in a Neoclassical style as well as building new monuments and features.

Most visible are the statues that dot the main streets and squares of the city. Skopje now has its own Arc de Triomphe, while the Statue of the

Warrior in the main square is the most triumphant of all. Anyone will tell you this is Alexander the Great – just don't tell the Greeks, who are sensitive to such matters and claim Alexander as their own.

Any taxi driver or bar tender will tell you that the money would have been much better spent on hospitals and education. However, the government points out that tourism numbers to Skopje have shot up, bringing much-needed revenue.

Five hundred years of Ottoman rule, followed by a tug of war over its territory and being part of Yugoslavia, have left Macedonia and its capital seeking an identity. Whether Skopje 2014 is part of the solution remains to be seen. But, for the visitor, it adds to the fascination of a city that is a melting pot of Christian and Muslim, old and new.

Whether exploring the many museums, browsing the shops of the old Turkish bazaar or hanging out in a café sipping macchiato, Skopje will reward the curious in spades.

✈ At the airport

Skopje is a 3-3.5hr flight from the UK. Flights arrive at the Alexander the Great Airport, 23km south-east of central Skopje. It's not a particularly large airport but has the basic facilities.

🚌 Getting into town

Several buses a day run from the airport to downtown (with stops at the Hotel Continental, International Bus Station and Holiday Inn); a ticket costs 150 denars (£2). Taxis are available 24 hours a day; the fixed fare to town is 1,220 denars (£16) or €20. There are several rental car agencies.

🚌 Other ways to arrive

International coaches run from Germany, Switzerland, Albania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia and others. However, information isn't that easy to come by – www.sas.com.mk has timetables but not in English. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

Population: 507,000

Languages: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish

Timezone: GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)

International dialling code: +389

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Currency: Macedonian denar (MKD), currently around 77MKD to the UK£. ATMs are widely available. Euros are often accepted.

Highest viewpoint: The Millennium Cross on Mount Vodno (1,066m), to the

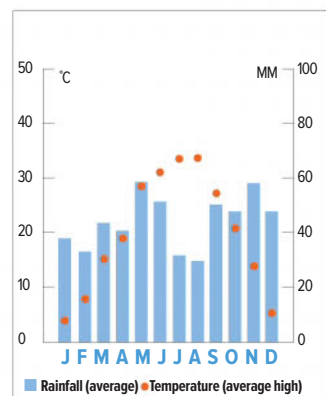
south-west; take a bus to Hotel Vodno, and then a cable car to the top.

Health issues: Beware of the dogs; rabies is prevalent here.

Recommended guidebook: *Macedonia* (Bradt, 2014)

Web resource: skopje.gov.mk

Climate: Mediterranean meets Continental. Long warm summers (July and August can reach 40°C). Snow is possible in winter but is more common in the mountains.



TOP TIP

Don't miss a visit to the main square at night – after dark the 22m-high Statue of the Warrior is lit up; marvel as, at certain times, fountains spurt in time to Viennese waltzes!

■ First Day's Tour

The city is bisected by the **Vardar River**.

The area south of the river is mainly Orthodox Christian; this is also where the rail and bus stations are, and most of the shopping centres. North of the river is **Carsija**, the older, Turkish part of town. The main sights are easily walkable.

Start in the south, at the **City Museum**, housed in the old railway station, which was mostly destroyed in the earthquake of 1963; the clock survives, stopped at 05:17.

Skopje's most famous daughter is **Mother Teresa**. A reconstruction of her home houses a commemorative museum.

The main square, known as **Plostad**, is dominated by the Statue of the Warrior; one exit from the square leads to the Arc de Triomphe. Heading north, you reach **Kamen Most**, the Stone Bridge. It dates back to the 15th century, and the Ottomans executed traitors here.

The bridge leads into the **bazaar**, the oldest part of the city. It is packed with small shops, cafés and bars.

Linger over a coffee or two: Macedonia has adopted coffee culture like a zealot, and it is hard to get a bad macchiato.



Also on this side of town are the **Kale Fortress**, **Mustafa Pasha Mosque** and **Sveti Spas Monastery**.

For dinner, you could head to the **Debar Maalo area**, famed for its restaurants. But, if you only have one night, return to the Old Bazaar, to **Pivnica An** (or Beerhouse An; Maksim Gorki 1), a traditional restaurant in a 15th-century caravanserai.



■ Where to Stay

Top end: Hotel Solun (Nikola Vapcarov 10; hotelsolun.com; pictured) is a well placed contemporary four-star, with art on the walls, good WiFi and a gym. It prides itself on its 'green' credentials. Bike hire is available for €15 a day. Doubles from around 4,400MKD (£57); Premium rooms from 9,000MKD (£117).

Mid-range: Hotel City Park (Mihail Cokov 8A; hotelcitypark.com.mk) is a small, friendly hotel to the west of the centre, close to the restaurants and bars

of Debar Maalo. It has large rooms with contemporary décor, as well as space for parking. Doubles from €90 (£70).

Budget: There are now two branches of the friendly family-run Shanti Hostel (Rade Jovcevski Korcagin 11 & Prespanska 18; shantihostel.com); both are situated within a few minutes' walk of the town centre as well as the bus and train stations. Dorm beds from €8pp (£6.25); private rooms and apartments also available.

■ Stay or Go

You can see much of Skopje in a day or two but it is also a good base for exploring the region. For instance, take a day trip to the remains of the ancient city of **Stobi**, with its Roman amphitheatre and villas, before getting an insight into Macedonia's ever improving wines over lunch at **Popova Kula**.

Alternatively, leave the city to see more of the country. Just 20 minutes from town, **Matka Canyon** offers hiking, rock-climbing and boat trips. A few hours further out, you

can chill at lovely lakeside **Ohrid** (pictured) a UNESCO World Heritage site. Take a boat trip, bathe in the clear waters and watch sunset as you dine on fresh trout.

Ohrid Town is an attractive base, or stay at the monastery of **St Naum**, now a hotel.

You can also hike or horse-ride in magnificent **Mavrovo National Park** or one of Macedonia's other parks. The country has plentiful mountains, lakes and wildlife, making it a great destination for outdoor adventures.



Fox views
A helicopter gets mint sightings of Fox Glacier as Aoraki/Mount Cook looms in the background



Westland/Tai Poutini National Park, New Zealand

Escape the chill of the northern hemisphere and head for this incredible South Island park, where the storm-battered Roberts Point Track is soon set to reopen

Get orientated

Westland/Tai Poutini National Park is the ideal space to let your inner explorer off the leash. The park stretches from the top of the Southern Alps in the east to the Tasman Sea in the west, and its dramatic glaciers, dense rainforest, coastal lagoons and vast lakes make it a haven for walkers and climbers.

One of its highlights – the Roberts Point Track – is set to reopen by March 2015; it has been closed since sustaining severe flood-damage in 2013. Starting at Douglas Bridge, the route meanders through Waiho Valley, across ice-carved rock, glacial outcrops and a vertigo-inducing suspension bridge, rewarding visitors with panoramic vistas of peaks and ice caps, including Franz Josef Glacier.

Getting there

Emirates (0344 800 2777, emirates.com) flies London Gatwick-Christchurch from £826 return; flight time 30 hours with stopovers.

The easiest way to reach the national park is by car. Located off State Highway Six, Westland/Tai Poutini is a 5.5-hour drive from Christchurch. Alternatively catch an internal flight from Christchurch to Hokitika (40mins; £156rt; airnewzealand.co.uk) and then drive (90mins). The Roberts Point Track is accessible via the Douglas Walk from Franz Josef Glacier car park.

The visit

The park's biggest draws are its 60 staggering glaciers, in particular Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers – the largest. For glacier views

without having to step on the ice, the Roberts Point Track is your best bet.

You can buy trail maps and find the latest weather forecasts at the DOC Westland/Tai Poutini National Park visitor centre. Beware of changing conditions; the weather can worsen suddenly so organise your trip wisely and make someone aware of your plans. Check www.doc.govt.nz for opening updates.

There's more to the park than glaciers, though. Also explore its lowland rainforests and coastal wetlands and lakes, such as the calm, reflective waters of Lake Matheson. These areas are perfect for wading birds: see threatened great-crested grebe at Lake Mapourika, elusive white heron at Okarito Lagoon and endangered rowi – the country's rarest kiwi – in the forests. ►



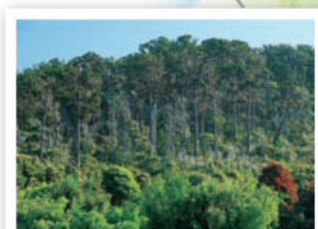
◆ Lake Matheson

On clear, still mornings, Aoraki/Mount Cook and Mount Tasman are reflected in the lake, which is enveloped by forest.



◆ Gillespies Beach

A historic gold-mining settlement 20km from Fox Glacier offers walks along an early miners' track and to a fur seal colony along the beach.



◆ Lowland rainforest

The park's extremely high rainfall (5,000mm a year at Franz Josef village) supports lush, densely ferned lowland podocarp forest, featuring local species.



◆ Ski touring

This is one of the best ways to experience the glaciers in the park. Ski-plane and helicopter tours also provide epic views.



◆ Franz Josef Glacier

A two-hour walk up the Waiho River from the Franz Josef Glacier village leads to the terminal face.



◆ Fox Glacier

Because of the risk of rock and ice falls, it is only safe for visitors to walk on the Fox Glacier – the largest glacier in the park – with a guide.



◆ Aoraki/Mount Cook and Mount Tasman

New Zealand's two highest peaks, stand behind Fox Glacier.

■ Essentials

Language: English

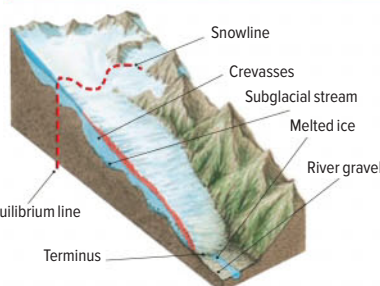
Time: GMT+12 (Oct-Apr GMT+13)

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: NZ dollar (NZ\$), currently around NZ\$2 to the UK£1

Health: Excellent facilities. Beware changing weather and strong sun.

This feature is adapted from the *DK Eyewitness New Zealand travel guide* (£15.99), the best visual guide to the country. www.traveldk.com



Glorious glaciers

A glacier is a large body of ice that forms on land and moves slowly downhill at a rate of about 1.5 metres a day. Glaciers are fed by snow accumulating in high-altitude basins where it condenses to form bluish ice. The ice field flows downhill under its own weight, cracking into a jumble of deep crevasses and collecting debris that scours the mountainsides, forming U-shaped valleys. The glacier ends at a terminal where the ice melts. The Franz Josef Glacier (11km long) and Fox Glacier (13km long) are unique in that they descend from regions of perpetual snow down to the rainforest close to the coast.

Aerial advantage
A sky-high view of
Boston; one of the oldest
cities in the USA



Boston, USA

There's never been a better time to enjoy the craic in the capital of Massachusetts: March brings St Patrick's Day, and the launch of the £99 airfare, says **Sarah Baxter**

Boston is green through and through. The hubbub of Downtown is calmed by leafy Boston Common – the USA's oldest park, which over the years has hosted British encampments, public hangings, Judy Garland and the Pope. Also, thanks to the urban planning of Frederick Law Olmsted – designer of NYC's Central Park – the city is threaded by an 11km-long 'Emerald Necklace' of open spaces, snaking south-west from that venerable Common, down tree-lined Commonwealth Avenue to the Back Bay Fens, Jamaica Pond and beyond. The colour theme even runs into the city's sports scene, with the Red Sox's famed baseball stadium, Fenway Park, painted in the trademarked hue, 'Fenway Green'.

However, Boston is never greener than in March. The city's population is 20% Irish-American; subsequently, not only does it claim to have more Irish bars than any other

city in the States, it holds one of the country's biggest and liveliest St Patrick's Day parades (15 March 2015). It also has an Irish Heritage Trail, a 5km-long walking route linking 20 key Celtic landmarks in the city, from the Rose Kennedy Greenway out to Fenway Park (irishheritagetrail.com).

Even better, if you have the luck of the Irish, you might be able to bag a bargain flight. On 27 March, Icelandic carrier Wow Air is launching a £99 one-way fare from Gatwick to Boston, leaving you extra cash to spend on the craic.

And Boston is definitely good craic. As one of North America's oldest cities, founded by English Puritans in 1630, it has heaps of history. Indeed, 2015 marks the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Sons of Liberty, the society that included Paul Revere and John Hancock, and which staged the Boston Tea Party protest in 1773, ultimately sparking the Revolution.

Boston also has a large student population (Harvard, MIT and five other highly rated universities are based hereabouts), which means there's great vibrancy, not to mention lots of bars. The city is the cultural hub of New England, with a world-class orchestra, a historic Theatre District and a thriving live music scene. And the locals are mad about sport – the best way to get their measure is by bagging a ticket to a Red Sox, Celtics (basketball), Bruins (ice hockey) or Patriots (American football) game.

You could easily stay for weeks, exploring the various neighbourhoods: Downtown, home to the Freedom Trail historic route and tasty Chinatown; affluent Beacon Hill; the shopping mecca of Back Bay, which until 150 years ago was untamed swamp; Italian-flavoured North End; trendy, gay-friendly South End; Cambridge, across the Charles River. But chances are you'll fall for it after only a day. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Boston can be visited year-round – though March means St Patrick's Day festivities. Weather is changeable. Summers can be hot and humid. Autumn is busy with passing leaf-peepers.

Getting there: Several airlines fly UK-Boston direct; flight time is around 7 hours. WOW Air (0118 321 8384, wowair.co.uk) is launching £99 (plus tax) one-way flights from Gatwick, via Reykjavik, on 27 March. Returns on other airlines cost from around £500.

Getting around: Logan Airport is 5km out of the city; the free SL1 bus (massport.com) runs from here to South Station (20-30mins); a train from the centre back to the airport costs \$2.50 (£1.60). Boston's T – the subway, bus, trolley and boat network (mbta.com) – makes it easy to explore. Reusable CharlieCards offer the cheapest fares.

Where to stay: Boston is a pretty pricey place to sleep. Nine Zero

(90 Tremont St; ninezero.com) is a central boutique hotel, with a daily 'wine hour' for guests; doubles from \$309 (£204) in March. The Revere (Boston Common; reverehotel.com) has smart rooms and an outdoor pool deck; doubles from \$286 (£189). Cheaper is the HI Hostel (19 Stuart St; hiusa.org/massachusetts/boston/boston); private doubles cost from \$99 (£65).

Where to eat: So many choices! Get food news at bostonmagazine.com. North End is the place to eat Italian; try Galleria Umberto (289 Hanover St), which won the city's 2014 Best Pizza crown. Boston has an innovative food truck scene, with vans selling everything from lobster sliders to Vietnamese pork (some all year, most April-October; see streetfoodapp.com/boston for schedules and locations).

More info: bostonusa.com; massvacation.com

Day 1: WALK TO FREEDOM

Start by following the **Freedom Trail**, the best introduction to Boston's past. This 4km route, marked by a red line, links 16 historic sites. It's easy to follow alone, or you can take a guided tour; a walk led by a costumed 18th-century character costs \$14 (£9) (thefreedomtrail.org).

The Trail leads east and north from **Boston Common** – the USA's oldest public park – to **The Battle of Bunker Hill Monument & Museum**, which commemorates a 1775 fight against the British. En route, you'll pass the **Granary and King's Chapel Burying Grounds** (where revolutionary greats lie), stately **Faneuil Hall** (the historic meeting house and marketplace, still packed with stalls), **Paul Revere House** (where the patriot lived, and now a fascinating reconstruction of 18th-century living) and North End's **Old North Church** – where, on 18 April 1775,



lanterns were lit on the steeple to warn of the British march on Concord, igniting the American Revolution. Linger in **North End** for pizza and cannoli before crossing the **Charles River** to finish at Bunker Hill.

Via **Rose Kennedy Greenway** (rosekennedygreenway.org), return through a series of parks with water features, public art, food trucks, farmers' markets, varied blooms and free Wi-Fi. Finish with a cocktail at chic **Alibi**, a bar in a former jail (215 Charles St; alibiboston.com).

TOP TIP

Want to see a Red Sox game but didn't buy a ticket in advance? Head to the Scalp Free Zone at Fenway Park's Gate C (open 90 minutes before the game starts); here, fans buy and sell tickets at face value.



Day 2: FUN & GAMES

Today, head east from the Common, into the **Public Gardens** to float in a **Swan Boat**; these have cruised the lagoon for 130 years (\$3; Apr-Sept).

To the north is **Beacon Hill**, a handsome cluster of cobbles and brownstones. In the 19th century, this area was home to the city's free black community; follow the **Black Heritage Trail**, which ends at the **African Meeting House**, built in 1806 (afroammuseum.org).

The streets south-west of the Public Gardens are lined with lovely houses. **Newbury Street** is best for shoppers; its stores and cafés get more indie the further down you go.

Turn south at Gloucester Street for The **Pru Tower's** 50th-floor **Skywalk Observatory** (\$16 [£10.50]; 800 Boylston St; skywalkboston.com). Also on Boylston are the **Old South Church**, **Trinity Church** and the finish line of the **Boston Marathon**.

Next, head to the **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum** (\$15 [£10]; 25 Evans Way; gardnermuseum.org), a collection of interesting artefacts housed in a 20th-century palace.

Finish at nearby **Fenway Park** (pictured) to watch the Red Sox. There are regular games in season (Apr-Oct; training games in Mar; see boston.redsox.mlb.com for more info).

Day 3: BRAIN FOOD

There's plenty more to see in the city. The most intelligent choice is to take the **Red Line subway to Harvard** (above), over the river in Cambridge, to wander around this hallowed Ivy League institution. You can join a free **student-led tour** (1hr; see the calendar at harvard.edu/visitors/tours for times and dates), attend a public lecture, visit the **Natural History Museum** and the **Peabody Museum of Archaeology**, and grab a coffee at one of the cafés around the square.

When you cross back over the Charles, consider walking along its south-side **Esplanade**, from the **Boston University Bridge** to the

Museum of Science (mos.org), via the Charles River Reservation, passing various parks, boats, joggers and birds. Alternatively, hit the water itself: from May to October, Paddle Boston (paddleboston.com/tours) runs a range of **guided kayak tours**, including Boston Harbour and Sunset & Skyline trips.

Instead of kayaking, you could indulge instead, joining **Bites of Boston's Sweet and Savory South End Walking Food Tour** (\$52 [£34]; bitesofbostonfoodtours.com), to stroll the streets sampling everything from Venezuelan specialties to New England fried clam. 🍷



Wanderlust
TRAVEL MAGAZINE

Next issue

THE BUCKET LIST

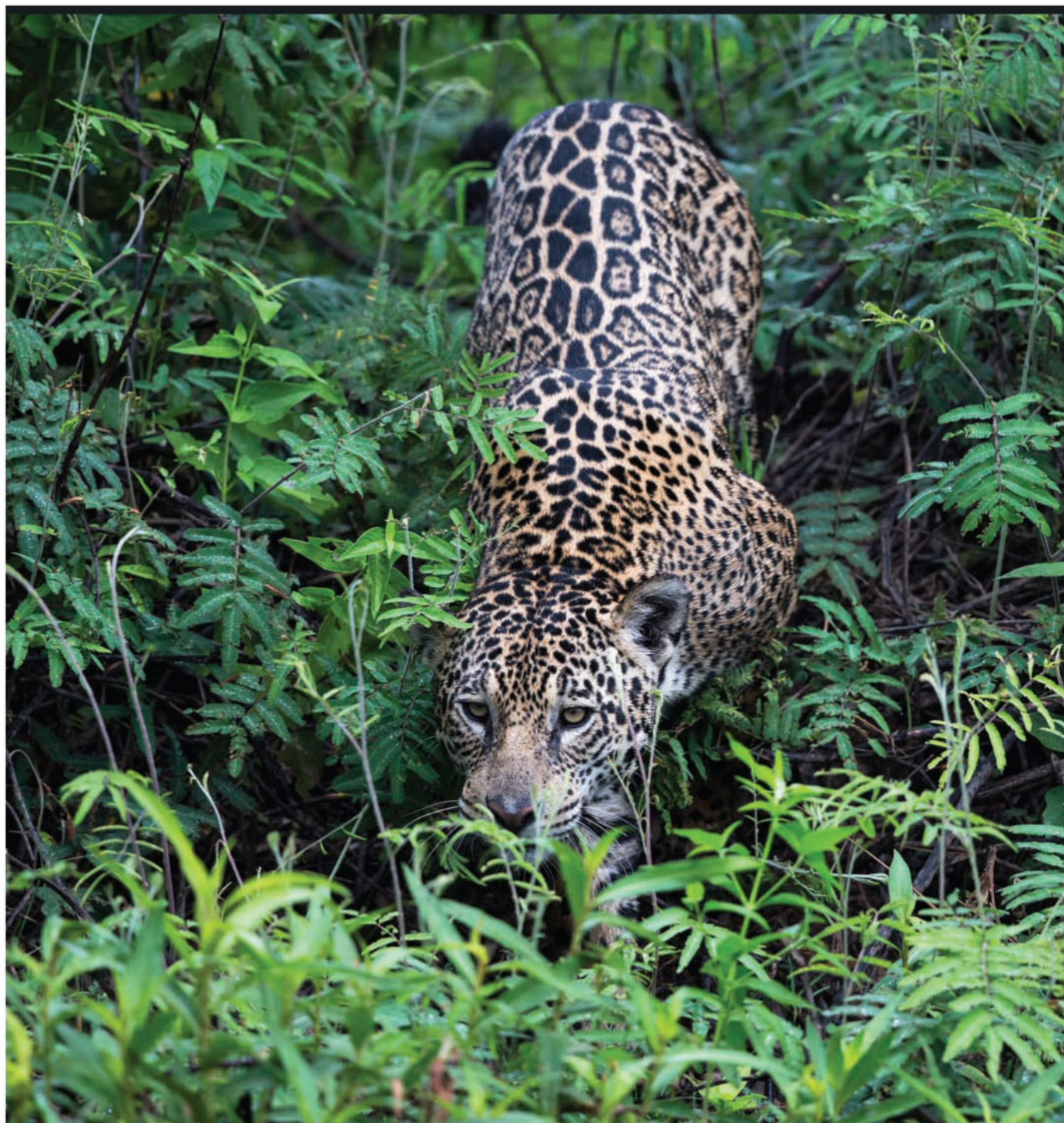
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How the experts do it

We've talked a lot about amateur photography this issue. You *Wanderlust*s have wowed us with your amazing Photo of the Year entries, each one bursting with talent and imagination, and challenging our judges to make some tough decisions.

Many of you ask us what it takes to be a professional travel photographer – how do you make the leap from snapping for fun

to doing it for a living? While there's no easy answer, studying the work of the pros is a good start. Be inspired by Photo of the Year judge Paul Goldstein's book for example. His new release – *Predator* (Vilo Publishing, £40) – will inspire you to push your own limits, one day soon you too will be capturing shots just like this cracker of a jaguar prowling Brazil's Pantanal.



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